

Exploring the social responsibility of tabloid journalism in South Africa: Views from the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun*

by

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Declaration

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Abstract

South African tabloids have been met with criticism and praise in equal measure since entering the newspaper market in the early 2000s. Allegations of failure to uphold the high ethical standards expected of the media in general have been levelled against these tabloids. Those defending tabloids contend that tabloids have brought new media audiences into the newspaper reading world. With this background in mind, this researcher set out to explore what journalists at two tabloid newspapers in South Africa, namely the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun*, think their social responsibility towards society is.

This study used the theoretical concepts of the media's social responsibility and Jürgen Habermas' public sphere to explore the role tabloid newspapers play in society. Working from the premise that the media have certain responsibilities to adhere to in society, this researcher explored how journalists at these two tabloids view as their responsibilities towards their readers. Furthermore, assuming that the public sphere consists of many publics, this researcher explored how the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* journalists view their responsibility towards readers who have been neglected by the so-called serious news media.

This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews to gather data from 10 journalists and one photographer at the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun*. The findings show that the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* journalists view their social responsibility as catering for the working class by empowering these readers with information that is relevant to them. Journalists view and describe the so-called "man in the blue overall" as their typical reader. According to the journalists, the news they write help to support democratic processes. Journalists at these two newspapers are fully aware that South Africa is an unequal society and see their roles as giving a voice to marginalised sections of society.

Opsomming

Sedert Suid-Afrikaanse poniekoerante aan die begin van die 2000s hul verskyning op die Suid-Afrikaanse koerantlandskap gemaak het, ontvang hulle beide kritiek en lof. Dié koerante word daarvan beskuldig dat hulle nie voldoen aan die hoë etiese standaarde waaraan die media in die algemeen gemeet word nie. Diegene wat poniekoerante verdedig, voer aan dat dié publikasies nuwe gehore na die koerantleserspubliek gebring het. Teen dié agtergrond, het hierdie studie ten doel gehad om ondersoek in te stel na wat joernaliste by twee poniekoerante, naamlik die *Daily Sun* en *Sunday Sun*, as hul sosiale verantwoordelikheid teenoor die gemeenskap beskou.

Die studie het die teoretiese konsepte van die media se sosiale verantwoordelikheid en Jürgen Habermas se openbare sfeer ingespan om die rol van poniekoerante in die samelewing te ondersoek. Met die veronderstelling dat die media sekere verantwoordelikhede teenoor die samelewing het, het die navorser ondersoek ingestel na hoe die joernaliste by die twee poniekoerante hul verantwoordelikhede teenoor hul lesers beskou. Deur verder aan te neem dat die openbare sfeer uit baie groeperinge bestaan, het die navorser ook gekyk na hoe die *Daily Sun* en *Sunday Sun* se joernaliste hul verantwoordelikheid beskou teenoor lesers wat deur die sogenaamde ernstige nuusmedia geïgnoreer word.

Dié kwalitatiewe studie het semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude gebruik om inligting by 10 joernaliste en een fotograaf van die *Daily Sun* en die *Sunday Sun* in te samel. Die bevindinge dui aan dat die *Daily Sun* en *Sunday Sun* se joernaliste dit as hul sosiale verantwoordelikheid beskou om voorsiening te maak vir die werkersklas deur hierdie lesers met inligting te bemagtig wat relevant tot hul lewens is. Joernaliste beskou en beskryf die sogenaamde “man in die blou oorpak” as hul tipiese leser. Volgens hierdie joernaliste help die nuus wat hulle skryf om demokratiese prosesse te ondersteun. Joernaliste by hierdie twee koerante is daarvan bewus dat Suid-Afrika ’n ongelyke samelewing is en beskou dit as hul rol om ’n stem te verskaf aan gemarginaliseerde lede van die samelewing.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Rationale

Since the arrival of contemporary tabloids in South Africa during the early 2000s, media scholars and commentators have criticised the genre over alleged low quality journalism and lack of ethical considerations (Wasserman, 2006:62). According to Wasserman (2005:34), tabloids in the South African democratic dispensation continue to face “bitter criticism by media professionals from various backgrounds”. Media academics argue that tabloids give professional journalism a bad name (see for instance: Holt, 2004; Wasserman, 2006; Matsebatlela, 2009; Wasserman, 2010; Steenveld & Strelitz, 2010; Boshoff, 2016). Rabe (2005) contends that tabloids “are a law unto themselves ... and do not comply with [ethical] codes” they subscribe to. Wasserman (2006:75) similarly says that “there is much to find fault within the South African tabloids”.

This researcher is interested in the quality of tabloid journalism topic because he is an avid reader of the South African tabloids, the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun*. This researcher would like to contribute new insights to the academic debates over tabloid journalism and its role in society. Since there is criticism of tabloids, this researcher would like to find out how tabloid journalists at these two newspapers in the Media24 stable, view such criticism and what they, as media professionals, think their contribution to socially responsible reporting should be.

Wasserman (2006: 87) says tabloids “should be taken seriously as a site for the shaping of public opinion and the building of identities”. According to Wasserman (2006:88), tabloids can create an alternative public sphere¹ where issues affecting society are discussed. This researcher would similarly argue that since tabloids have established a loyal readership among South Africans, they need to be taken seriously despite the criticism levelled against them.

According to the Annual Bureau of Circulation of South Africa (ABC) statistics for the second quarter of 2017, the *Daily Sun* had a total circulation of 164 923. As such, the *Daily Sun* was the biggest South African daily at the time of writing. Media24’s marketing intelligence analyst, Lilian De Araujo (2018), says the circulation of 164 923 of the *Daily Sun* translates into 4 951 000 million readers per day (See Addendum A, Figure1). The number two spot went to

¹ According to Duelund (2010: 26), the public sphere is a term coined in 1961 by German philosopher Jürgen Habermas in his doctoral thesis titled “The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society”. Says Duelund (2010: 27), the term refers to an imaginary public space where people gather to freely discuss socio-political issues in order to influence political action. The concept of the public sphere will be discussed further in Chapter 3 where the theory will be ventilated in detail.

another tabloid, *Isolezwe* which commanded a total circulation figure of 85 491. The first so-called serious newspaper on the list is *The Star*, with a circulation of 80 345 for the same period. The number four and number five spots were occupied by the *Sowetan* (73 610) and *Son* (72 057) respectively. This indicates that three (*Daily Sun*, *Isolezwe* and *Son*) of the top five South African dailies are tabloids.

The biggest selling Sunday read is still the *Sunday Times* with a total circulation figure of 262 715 369, according to the Annual Bureau of Circulation of South Africa (ABC) statistics for the second quarter of 2017. However, with a total circulation of 78 359 the *Sunday Sun* still performed better compared to another serious Sunday read the *City Press*, which had a total circulation of 68 645.

De Araujo (2018) says 94% of the *Daily Sun*'s readers are black (See Addendum A, Figure 2). Moreover, the 4 951 000 million readers, only 46% of them have matric and 37% have less than matric (See Addendum A, Figure 3).

This researcher would therefore argue that, when the professional values and standards of tabloids are gauged, they need to be gauged according to the same measures as that of the so-called serious news media due to their greater audience reach. In addition, this researcher's argument is supported by the fact that these tabloids also subscribe to the same Code of Conduct (the SA Press Code) as their more serious counterparts. This study will explore decision-making processes, the possible ethical implications of these editorial choices and what such decisions say about the quality of journalism at the tabloids. This will be done by interviewing journalists and editors at the tabloids the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun*.

Based on the demographic representation (See Addendum A, Figures 1 – 6) of the readers of the *Daily Sun*, this researcher would move that the majority of the people who read tabloids in South Africa are of the working class.

As the literature review in Chapter 2 will show, the South African media landscape is marked by class and race. This researcher would argue that because of South Africa's apartheid history, race plays an important role in issues of class and poverty.

Statistics South Africa (2018), or StatsSA in short, says black Africans, females, people from rural areas of the Eastern Cape and Limpopo provinces, and those with little to no education are the main victims in the ongoing struggle against poverty. This fact is supported by the *Daily Sun*'s readership analysis (See Addendum A, Figure 4) which shows that only 37% of the tabloid's readers are employed while 33% is actively looking for employment (De Araujo, 2018). In

addition, where the StatsSA data support the *Daily Sun*'s readership analysis is the fact that only 17% of the tabloid readers have tertiary qualifications (De Araujo, 2018).

The readers of the *Daily Sun*, according to De Araujo (2018), at least 22% earn between R2500 per month and just under R5000 per month (See Addendum A, Figure 5) and at 22%, this is the newspaper's biggest income group.

1.2 Preliminary literature review

As this preliminary literature review will show, a lot of studies have been conducted that address tabloid journalism in South Africa (see for instance: Holt, 2004; Wasserman, 2006; Matsebatlela, 2009; Wasserman, 2010; Steenveld & Strelitz, 2010; Boshoff, 2016). According to these academics, South African tabloids, given their popularity among newspaper readers, have a greater role to play in society, ranging from the broadening of the public sphere to the shaping of identities. Furthermore, these media scholars argue that although tabloids exist for commercial reasons, their popularity among readers cannot be ignored, rather, instead of relegating them to the position of the other, they should be seen as part of the South African media landscape existing to serve the public.

According to Keeble (2009:159), although tabloids should be seen as existing to serve the public, celebrity scandals have always been the "staple ingredient" of tabloids amid allegations of decreasing media standards.

This researcher's study will build on the work of Matsebatlela (2009) who focused on tabloids reporting about celebrities, representation of black celebrities in the tabloids and the role tabloids can play in portraying black celebrities in the media.

According to Rabe (2005), even though tabloid newspapers are still expected to uphold journalism ethics, they do not do so. Berger (2004) similarly argues that tabloids give journalism a bad name with their inflammatory headlines which "lack some of the basics of journalism".

This study aims to add to the current body of knowledge about tabloid journalism by conducting empirical research about how journalists view the social responsibility of the tabloids they work for. Specific attention will be paid to the way in which tabloid journalists approach their reporting as part of the broadening of the public sphere. This study will also seek to understand how these journalists motivate their decisions when reporting about the lives of local celebrities which sometimes make front page headlines. Tabloid journalism studies by academics mentioned

above, focus specifically on daily newspapers such as the *Daily Sun*, and *Son*, among other South African tabloids. This study is arguably innovative because it aims to explore what tabloid journalists themselves view as socially responsible reporting. It also aims to explore how they view social responsibility of tabloids and whether they believe they give a voice to marginalised sections of society.

The following sections of this preliminary literature review will pay attention to what constitutes a tabloid and tabloid journalism. Furthermore, this researcher will reflect on criticism of tabloids' alleged transgressions of ethical norms and issues around individuals' right to privacy.

1.2.1 Tabloid journalism

According to Skovsgaard (2014:202), the word tabloid:

... originally refers to [a] half-sized broadsheet newspaper, but connotations of tabloid journalism go way beyond the format of the newspaper. Tabloidisation points to a more extensive use of narratives and or limited use of analytical mode, as well as greater emphasis on personal and human interest stories.

Watson and Hill (2010:282) say tabloidisation refers to “populist content and design, and demonstrating fascination for covering lives and antics of celebrities”. This type of journalism is also known as celebrity journalism, although celebrity news can also be contained in serious news media. Watson and Hill (2010:146) define celebrity journalism as “the preoccupation in modern print journalism with recording the activities, sayings and scandals of celebrities”.

As a regular reader of the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun*, this researcher has observed that various editions of the tabloids predominantly feature celebrity news. Sometimes salacious celebrity news seize front page headlines and page 3 in both the tabloids, although less so in the *Daily Sun* as in the *Sunday Sun*. For instance, the *Sunday Sun* edition of 23 April 2017 contained a front page story detailing how 58-year old actress, Thembi Nyandeni, who stars in Mzansi Magic telenovela *Isibaya*, had an all alleged sex tape doing the rounds on social networking sites (Masungwini, 2017a:1). Screenshot of the sex tape published in the tabloid show an elderly woman fitting Thembi's appearance and facial features, giving oral pleasure to an unidentified

man (Masungwini, 2017a:1). In the same edition, the tabloid published an article on page 3 detailing how TV and radio personality Pearl Modiadiae is back together with her fiancée after the couple sorted out their relationship issues (Notho, 2017:3).

The *Daily Sun* also does not shy away from publishing scandalous stories accompanied by titillating pictures on its front page. The tabloid's 31 October 2017 edition published a story detailing how award winning rapper Emtee is apologising to South Africans after he posted a live video on Instagram clearly showing his penis (Luhanga, 2017a:1). Luhanga (2017a:2) wrote that Emtee's penis "made an unexpected guest appearance" in the video. According to the *Daily Sun*, when contacted for comment by the tabloid, Emtee admitted that indeed it was his penis on the video and the rapper "was sorry about such a big mistake" (Luhanga, 2017a:2).

In the South African context, Wasserman (2005:34) says tabloids have much in common with each other such as focusing their editorial content on gossip and scandal. Wigston (2007:52) adds that tabloids stir debates over the quality of journalism since they focus mostly on "sensationalism, sex, bizarre and gory stories" and lack coverage of socio-political issues shaping public discourse. According to Matsebatlela (2009:82):

Tabloids use offensive language in some of their articles and headlines. By using such offensive words in their front page headlines, newspapers are virtually endorsing the use of such words by society. Tabloids tend to have a penchant for overemphasis on negativity when reporting.

While tabloids focus on sensationalising stories and the private lives of celebrities, they are also designed to catch the public's attention, says Wasserman (2010:43): "Their mastheads are brightly coloured, and the headlines, printed in big capital letters and often underlined, italicised, or with an exclamation mark adding emphasis, scream out a sensational bit of news across the whole front page."

Given this criticism, I would argue that tabloid media, like journalism in general, need to apply ethics to their professional work in order to exercise care and consideration of their news subjects as provided for by the press code. This necessitates a reflection on media ethics as discussed below.

1.2.2 Tabloids and media ethics

Wasserman (2005:34) says criticism over tabloids centres on “the perceived low quality of journalism practised by these publications, and concerns about the lack of ethical standards guiding the actions of tabloid journalists”. According to Wasserman (2006:63), “the strongest criticism levelled against tabloids in popular debates is that of unethical behaviour”. Although Wasserman (2006:74) argues that tabloids should be taken seriously, he also states tabloids have been engaging in “despicable journalism”.

Boeyink and Borden (2010:1) say sometimes journalists find themselves in tough ethical situations where decisions need to be taken and it is not clear in the press code what journalists need to do. This is arguably the case for tabloid journalists too. According to Boeyink and Borden (2010:3), all journalists have a duty to be truthful and avoid harming others. Foreman (2010:89) adds that in the interest of minimising harm, journalists should remove a detail from a story if its news value does not justify the harm caused by reporting it. However, Boeyink and Borden (2010:17) say that telling the truth and minimising harm are two conflicting phrases “because telling the truth often hurts people”.

Foreman (2010:6) argues that ethical journalists should be concerned not only with reporting the news but also with how their reporting will affect the people involved in a story. Boeyink and Borden (2010:17) add: “Not only do journalists risk harming those whose privacy they violate, but they risk harming third parties who are not the story but get hurt nevertheless.”

Jones and Holmes (2011:208) posit that the chief concern among critics of tabloidisation is that professional standards of journalism are being compromised and as a result, the quality of journalism in general also suffers.

Wasserman (2006:74) suggests the strong presence and success of tabloids in South Africa presents an opportunity to investigate tabloid standards in a bid to repair the journalism profession. This study aims to add to this debate by exploring to what extent tabloid journalists contest the existing perception of alleged transgression of ethical norms and deteriorating journalism standards.

One ethical issue that warrants further exploration when it comes to tabloid journalism is how tabloids report about private lives of those who are in the public eye and how these newspapers sometimes invade the privacy of those they report on. Thus, how tabloids navigate around issues of privacy while upholding media ethics is a discussion worth exploring.

The *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* subscribe to the South African Press Code and therefore have a professional duty to uphold the principles and values contained in this code – regardless of the nature of the kind of news they cover.

1.2.3 Tabloids and individuals' rights to privacy

While tabloid journalism has a distinct style and approach, the public should arguably still expect ethical reporting and writing. As discussed above, researchers have argued that tabloids sensationalise news, offer no critical analysis of news shaping society and pay attention to gossip and scandal based on the celebrities' personal lives. Although the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996:7) makes provision for freedom of the press and other media, it also states that everyone has a right to privacy. Furthermore, the South African Press Code (2013:15) requires that the press “exercise care and consideration in matters involving the lives and concerns of individuals”. However, the code adds that “the right to privacy may be overridden by a legitimate public interest” (South African Press Code, 2013:15).

According to Keeble (2009:135-136), public interest is defined as “detecting or exposing crime or serious misdemeanour, anti-social behaviour, protecting public health and safety and preventing the public from being misled by some statement or action of that individual”. Wasserman (2006:72) says although the term public interest has been invoked as a guiding principle for media actions, it remains vague and has not been adequately defined in terms of inequalities regarding access to the media. It is used in rhetorical fashion by the media in exceptionalist terms to justify dubious conduct such as invasion of a public figure's privacy, says Wasserman (2006:72).

To override an individual's right to privacy, the press needs to report facts which are “substantially true” and the article is “prepared in accordance with acceptable principles of journalistic conduct and in the public interest,” reads the South African Press Code (2013:15).

Although all individuals enjoy the right to privacy as provided for in the Constitution, it is clear from the press code that such a right is not absolute. According to Oosthuizen (2014:189), the right to privacy of “public figures and people who are involved in newsworthy events, whom the media will naturally report on,” can be overridden by a legitimate public interest. Oosthuizen (2014:189) argues that such reports on public figures and newsworthy individuals are provided

for because they have chosen to lead a public life and are in search of publicity and as such, their activities “have become matters of public interest and can no longer be considered private”.

According to Boeyink and Borden (2010:14), journalists often violate people’s privacy by publishing embarrassing personal information and images as well as intruding on an individual’s peace at their home. Rabe (2005) argues that tabloids should anticipate consequences permeating from their decisions to publish news involving private lives of individuals and in the interest of practising responsible journalism, they need to “maximise the truth and minimise harm”.

The literature reviewed in this section raises several questions: What do tabloid journalists think their role in society is? How do tabloid journalists define what is in the public interest? How do they motivate their decision to invade the privacy of individuals? As this researcher has argued above, tabloids need to be socially responsible when reporting. Since the media can override a newsmaker’s right to privacy, where do tabloids draw the line? How does their reporting serve the public interest?

These and other questions will arguably also be answered by this study of journalists at the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun*.

1.3 Problem statement and focus

This study will examine what journalists at the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* view as socially responsible reporting. While taking cognisance of the editorial focus of tabloids, this study further aims to explore the roles that these tabloids fulfil, in relation to the media function of social responsibility and the creation of alternative public sphere. This study will thus explore journalists’ views on socially responsible journalism and on the social responsibility of the media concurrently.

Since there is criticism of tabloid journalists and their standards, this study will explore how the journalists at these two tabloids view criticism and what they as media practitioners, in the field of tabloid journalism, see as their contribution to the media’s responsibility towards society.

1.4 Research questions

The research problem summarised above, will be addressed by answering the following questions:

- General research question

How do journalists at the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* view and describe their social responsibility towards society?

Specific research questions

- What role do journalists at the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* believe tabloids fulfil in society?
- What do journalists at the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* view as socially responsible reporting in tabloid journalism?
- What do journalists at the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* believe is their role in catering for marginalised voices?

1.5 Theoretical framework

In order to address the research questions, this study will use a combination of the normative ethical framework of social responsibility theory and the basic tenets of public sphere theory. These theoretical frameworks are relevant to this study because in South Africa, the media subscribe to the social responsibility theory by contributing to democratic process, says Oosthuizen (2014:36).

According to Oosthuizen (2002:36), in countries where the media subscribe to the social responsibility theory, “policy makers ensure the media optimally contributes to the democratic process, while simultaneously providing the envisaged social benefits to media users”. By exploring the way in which journalists describe their role in society, this researcher will be able to establish whether the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* subscribe to the social responsibility theory in practice.

Retief (2002:221) says social responsibility refers to the self-control that media practitioners need to exercise. Oosthuizen (2002:37) elaborates that in social responsibility theory, the media have a responsibility towards the society it serves by catering for various audiences and striving for accuracy and objectivity. Accuracy and objectivity are key media ethical principles. Christians and Nordenstreng (2004:22) agree saying accuracy is a principle that cuts across all journalism genres. Christians and Nordenstreng (2004:23) further say the truth is a cornerstone in any social communication.

In widening social communication, tabloids widen the media landscape by catering for audiences who cannot access mainstream print-media discussions, says Wasserman (2010:87). According to Wasserman (2010:88), tabloids offer an alternative public sphere where socio-political issues can be ventilated in ways that tabloid audiences can understand and identify with.

Similarly, I would argue that the public sphere is also part of social communication. Duvenage (2007:328) defines the public sphere as:

The physical symbolic space that opened up under modern conditions to allow free citizens to engage (communicate) with one another, in a reasonable manner, on all the major issues that constitute modern enlightened life.

According to Habermas (2006:415), one of the key proponents of the public sphere concept, it is “an intermediary system of communication between formally organised and informal face-to-face deliberations in arenas at both the top and the bottom of the political system”. The public sphere helps in shaping public opinion, says Habermas (1989:89). Habermas (2006:417) says this public opinion is formulated as a result of convergence of politicians, lobbyists and special interest groups, who come from various vantage points of the functional system and status groups they represent. “Together with journalists, all of them join in the construction of what we call ‘public opinion,’ though this singular phrase only refers to the prevailing one among several public opinions,” says Habermas (2006:417).

Says Habermas (2006:419):

In the press, there is a spillover of political news and commentaries from prestigious newspapers and political magazines with nationwide circulation into other media. As far as input from the outside is concerned, politicians and political parties are, of course, by far the most important suppliers,”

I would argue that by focusing on the input from such elite sources the so-called serious news media have neglected to cater for other sectors of society such as the working class or those who

come from not such prestigious sectors of society. Tabloids have identified this gap in the market and saw an opportunity to create an alternative public sphere, says Wasserman (2005:35).

These theoretical frameworks are relevant to this study as they will support the researcher in his exploration to gain insight in what the journalists at the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* view as their social responsibility towards their readers – especially with regards to catering for an alternative public sphere.

1.6 Research design and methodology

This researcher will use a qualitative research design to undertake this study. Lindlof and Taylor (2002:18) say qualitative research aims to preserve and analyse situations, content and experience of social action. This approach is applicable to this study's exploration and description of the experiences of journalists at two of Media24's tabloids.

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with journalists and editors at the tabloids. According to Strydom and Bezuidenhout (2014:188), semi-structured interviews refer to “a qualitative data collection method which allows you to pose questions to participants with the aim of learning more about their views, opinions and beliefs about a specific phenomenon”.

The tabloids explored in this study fit the description of what constitutes a tabloid as discussed in the literature review above. The newspapers are both publications of Media24.

According to the *Daily Sun*'s verified Facebook page, the tabloid is South Africa's “largest – and loudest – daily newspaper” (*Daily Sun*, 2017). The newspaper's Facebook page also says its target readers are “average Joes – Mr and Mrs Tshabalala” – township slang for the working class and the unemployed (*Daily Sun*, 2017). The page also reads: “Its brother, the *Sunday Sun*, is the fastest growing Sunday paper in South Africa (*Daily Sun*, 2017). According to Media24 website, the *Sunday Sun* “is an exciting Sunday tabloid filled with entertainment and lots of celebrity news,” (Media24, n.d.).

Studying two tabloids with similar characteristics, from the same company will provide insights into tabloid journalism in South Africa where the majority of readers are part of the working class.

This researcher will gather data using semi-structured interviews at these newspapers. The data will be analysed in terms of thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006:79) say “thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data”. A

theme captures crucial aspects of data in relation to research question and embodies some form of gist within the data set, say Braun and Clarke (2006:82).

1.7 Chapter layout

1.7.1 Chapter 1: Introduction

In this section, this researcher introduced the topic for this study, ventilated on the problem statement and what the research questions are. This researcher also gave a brief overview of literature review, theoretical framework and research methodology for the study.

1.7.2 Chapter 2: Literature review

In Chapter 2, this researcher will reflect in detail on tabloid journalism in South Africa and other parts of the world. While reflecting on literature, this researcher will frame how such literature review relates to his research project and the areas that were not touched on before by other academics that he will explore.

1.7.3 Chapter 3: Discussion of theoretical framework

In this chapter, this researcher will discuss the theoretical frameworks employed for this study to help this researcher answer his research questions. The theoretical frameworks of social responsibility and public sphere will be ventilated in great detail and how these theoretical concepts relate to the role of tabloid journalism in South Africa.

1.7.4 Chapter 4: Discussion of research design

In this chapter, this researcher will discuss how he went about conducting his research. This will be done by giving a detailed analysis of the qualitative research methodology and the sampling method of purposive sampling. This researcher will also give a discussion of semi-structured interviews and data analysis. The chapter will also reflect on advantages and disadvantages of qualitative research design, purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews and this researcher

will move to clarify how he will navigate around disadvantages of the research methodology and sampling undertaken.

1.7.5 Chapter 5: Presentation and discussion of results

In this chapter, this researcher will present research findings, going into details of the how journalists view their responsibility in society including how they do their work. The findings will answer all the research questions stated in Chapter 1.

1.7.6 Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this chapter, this researcher will reflect on how he went about conducting his study, from the selection of relevant literature, what the research questions are and whether they were answered in the findings or not. The findings will be briefly analysed and conclusion stated while recommending future studies that should be undertaken that this study could not answer.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, tabloid journalism has been researched in various contexts and from a variety of vantage points. In this chapter, this researcher will further elaborate on literature that deals with the nature of tabloid journalism and how journalists speak about their role in society, and about their role as tabloid journalists specifically.

According to Hart (1999:13), doing a literature review “ensures the researchability of your topic before ‘proper’ research commences”. A literature review, adds Du Plooy (2009:61), helps to identify what has been written before in a specific field. Says Du Plooy (2009:60): “The purpose of doing a literature survey is to find material related to the conceptual focus of the research problem.” Randolph (2009:2) adds that the literature review “provides a framework for relating new findings to previous findings”.

According to Leedy (1980:64), doing a literature review also helps a researcher with new ideas and approaches and introduces a researcher to other researchers with similar research interests. Howard (2014:101) adds that conducting a literature review helps in determining the most important issues to focus on when conducting your own research. In addition to the abovementioned definitions of a literature review Wigston (2009:19) says:

The prime purpose [of literature review] is to help us construct a framework in which we can then conduct our research in order to resolve the problem. In order to fulfil this purpose we need to look for theories and existing research that relate to our problem.

It is with the aforementioned definitions of a literature review in mind that this chapter establishes the nature of existing debates relating to the role tabloids play in society and how tabloid journalists view their social responsibility towards society.

2.2 Gaps in the field of research

A thorough literature review and searches on academic databases such as Google Scholar, Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Press and the Stellenbosch University library catalogue, show there is currently no scholarly work exploring how journalists from the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* speak about their roles as journalists and what they view as their social responsibility. Similarly, at the time of writing, no specific studies have been done that investigate how tabloid journalists navigate their reporting when it comes to the privacy of those who live in the public eye.

Most of the available academic research pertaining to tabloid journalism in South Africa, is centred on the *Daily Sun*, and has been conducted using analysis of the newspaper content itself. The journalists working there have not, up until now, spoken with academics about how they view their role in society. Although Wasserman (2010:151-174) has done interviews with journalists at the *Daily Sun* as well as with journalists from other South African tabloids, his research pertains to tabloid journalists' perceptions on how they are viewed by their mainstream counterparts; how their readers view them; and, how they believe they integrate their readers' quest for better lives with the political issues happening in the country.

Wasserman (2006:75) suggests that "too easy inferences between content and audience preference should be avoided" during debates about tabloids. Rather, says Wasserman (2006:74), the debate should move to the interrogation of professional standards. Wasserman (2006:74) argues that "simplistic binaries between mainstream media and tabloid media should be avoided" and tabloids should be accepted for their different "style, content and emphasis". Furthermore, Wasserman (2006:74) argues:

The danger inherent in creating dichotomies (such as 'professional: unprofessional'; 'information: entertainment'; 'quality: popular') between mainstream media and tabloid media is that it relegates tabloid to a position of other. Caught up in such a binary, it becomes difficult if not impossible to recognise the positive and negative aspects of tabloids, because they remain the deficient and inferior other of the mainstream self.

This study seeks to heed the call by Wasserman to move beyond a view of tabloid journalism as inferior to mainstream media. Instead, this researcher will seek to understand professional experiences of tabloid journalists especially as such experiences relate to their social responsibility as media practitioners and how they navigate around ethical norms against which all journalists are measured. Such an exploration will aid in understanding these journalists' professional values as related to how they carry out their duties on a daily basis. At the time of writing, no such research has been done about the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* and their journalists. This study will employ face-to-face semi-structured interviews in a natural setting (the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* newsrooms) to describe these tabloids' social responsibility, including norms and standards.

2.3 Tabloid journalism

In this section this researcher will pay specific attention to what academics have written and found in their respective scholarly works on the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun*. Research on other tabloids in South Africa and abroad will also be discussed. In the available literature on the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun*, media academics discuss various themes that range from the criticism against editorial content and language use, to the defence of tabloid journalism as they are seen to be creating an alternative public sphere. Other themes include criticism about the commercialisation of the media in a bid to attract readers.

2.3.1 Criticism against versus praise for tabloid journalism

Popović and Popović (2014:1) say that the media define which events are crucial, as well as define the kind of space such events will receive as it relates to how media audiences need to understand such events. Similarly, McQuail (2013:38) says the media play an important role in the formulation and expression of public opinion by stimulating debates and diversity of views. According to McQuail (2013:38), "journalism reflects back to authorities the state of the nation and its discontents". Thus, says McQuail (2013:38), the media monitor events and circumstances affecting society and provide warning of risk and impending dangers.

Due to the role the media play in society, Wasserman (2010:XV) argues that "South African tabloids deserve to be taken seriously". Yet, the word tabloid "usually has a negative connotation, because it has become associated with poor quality content and techniques of

unethical reporting”, say Popović and Popović (2014:12). Despite this negative connotation, the media’s primary role in society in general is to function as watchdogs rather than as reporters of celebrity gossip and scandals. As such, tabloids are catering for readers who have long been neglected by the so-called serious news media, says Wasserman (2006:3). According to Wasserman (2010:87), tabloids afford ordinary people a chance to relate their stories and bring the struggles of their daily lives into the public. Robertson (2013) adds that tabloid-style stories are accessible as they speak to tabloid audiences about things they can relate to and are familiar with.

In the South African tabloid context, Wigston (2007:32) says the South African press “from its very beginnings in the Cape Colony, has been organised in terms of race and language”. Wasserman (2010:6) agrees with this view, adding: “The emergence of tabloids has made it clear that South African media audiences remain marked by race, ethnicity, and class.” As discussed in Chapter 1, a market analysis of the *Daily Sun* newspaper shows that the majority (94%) of this newspaper’s readers are black. For this study, this researcher will also seek to find out whether journalists at the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* catering for a specific demographic can be attributed to creating and maintaining an alternative public sphere.

According to Örnebring and Jöhnson (2004:287), tabloid journalism has managed to attract “new publics” by focusing on issues previously ignored by mainstream media. Therefore, adds Wasserman (2010:87-88), by widening the media landscape to include audiences who cannot access mainstream print-media discussions, tabloids offer an alternative public sphere where socio-political issues can be ventilated in ways that tabloid audiences can understand and identify with.

Wasserman (2005:35) argues that tabloids have actually done more for the journalism profession than their critics would like to give them credit for; especially in the creation of an alternative public sphere. If claims are true that tabloids provide access to sections of society that have been disregarded by the so called serious news media, tabloids have a contribution to make in society in broadening various discourse shaping the country, says Wasserman (2005:35).

Jones, Vanderhaegen and Viney (2008:176) add that although the *Daily Sun* exists for commercial reasons, the tabloid has managed to attract new newspaper audiences who were previously ignored by mainstream print media. Moreover, say Jones *et al* (2008:176), the tabloid gives audiences access to information relevant to them, provides for societal dialogue and the creation of a marketplace of ideas. Örnebring and Jöhnson (2004:293) say tabloid journalism has

broadened the public sphere – by giving groups that were previously neglected by “prestige press” – access to news, and has the ability to “effect societal change by redefining previously undebatable issues as in need of debate. According to Jones *et al* (2008:173), tabloids are indeed an alternative arena for public discourse:

Tabloid journalism has the ability to broaden the public knowledge base as well as widen the reader demographic, giving new access to groups that previously were not targeted, and effect societal change by redefining previously undebatable issues in need of debate, as the *Daily Sun* has done with regards to many areas such as health, education and housing.

According to Jones *et al* (2008:176), these readers are a public sphere “that comes about as a result of participation by a unique group of people in particular socio-political and economic context”. It is noteworthy, however, that Wasserman (2006:75) is of the view that the popularity of tabloids does not necessarily translate to the creation of alternative public sphere: “Readers may buy tabloids partly because they are cheap, and not only because they provide desired content.” In contrast, Wasserman (2006:35) continues that tabloids offer a voice to the majority of the working-class “whose perspectives remain marginalised in the mainstream print media of the post-apartheid era”. Moreover, Wigston (2007:32) says tabloids such as the *Daily Sun* seem to have brought readers into the newspaper reading world.

In spite of the above argument, Wasserman (2006:35) notes that tabloids avoid “formal political coverage, sensationalise news, and publish excessively lurid or graphic pictures” with a strong focus on sports and entertainment. According to Turner (2004:76), tabloids “sacrifice information for entertainment, accuracy for sensation” and use tactics which trick and exploit news subjects.

One of the positive aspect on tabloids performance in the market, says Wasserman (2005:35), is that tabloids do take into account an African cultural perspective. According to Wasserman (2005:35), on closer scrutiny, however, it becomes clear that such perspective is limited to stories on witchcraft, superstition and miracle cures. Wasserman (2005:35) argues that as a result, the attempts by tabloids to introduce African cultural understanding in the media where Western understanding dominates are reductionist and essentialist.

Similarly, Steenveld and Strelitz (2010:535) have not shied away from scrutinising the *Daily Sun* saying it sometimes appears as trash due to its lack of journalistic ethics – “especially in regard to its reporting of tokoloshe² stories – and its shock aesthetic”.

Wasserman (2010:63) says tabloid stories about tokoloshes raise ethical questions especially because there is no other source who can verify a source’s claim that they have been raped by a tokoloshe. “In this case, it becomes more difficult to decide whether stories about rapes committed by snakes or gorillas actually mislead their readers, or whether they are so clearly fictional as to be understood by their readers as fantasy and diversion,” says Wasserman (2010:63). However, Jones *et al* (2008:173) say the *Daily Sun* is simply delivering stories that appeal to social, cultural and traditional beliefs of its readers. According to Harber (2011): “The *Daily Sun* is the only paper genuinely bursting the suburban bubble, and has become an occasional must-read for anyone trying to understand [South Africa].”

Despite the criticism of tabloids writing about witchcraft, Niehaus (2010:71), who conducted an empirical study in the Mpumalanga village of Bushbuckridge, says villagers there do believe in witchcraft. Niehaus (2010:71) says the villagers believe witchcraft has nothing to do with issues of African identity but have everything to do with the allocation of blame for misfortune in an economically marginalised and insecure environment. Niehaus (2010:65) found that villagers of Bushbuckridge do believe in witchcraft as they have experienced it. According to Niehaus (2010:65), villagers described witches as jealous neighbours and relatives who perpetrated revenge by mystical means. “The imagined technologies of witchcraft included poisons, potions that caused suicide and motor vehicle accidents and familiars such as the snake-like mamlambo and the ape-like tokoloshe,” says Niehaus (2010:65). According to Niehaus (2010:65), the salience of witchcraft has been documented by anthropologists in other parts of the country including informal settlements of Cape Town and Venda’s biggest town of Thohoyandou in Limpopo.

It could therefore be argued that despite criticism against tabloids for writing about tokoloshes and the like, their potential readers do indeed see these phenomena as real.

Wigston (2007:52) notes that South African tabloids have “stirred a debate regarding the quality of journalism, in that they focus largely on sensationalism, sex, bizarre and gory stories

² Sangoma Sibongile Ndlovu defines a tokoloshe as a powerful creature made of all sorts of things like leftovers from traditional beer, porridge, needles, grave soil, dolls or even water used to wash a corpse (Mdluli, 2015). Ndlovu says a tokoloshe appears in many forms such as a dog, cat or even a baboon, depending on the intentions of the owner or maker (Mdluli, 2015).

and they lack coverage of politics and serious issues like HIV/AIDS”. According to Wigston (2007:52), tabloids carry useful features on life skills and personal finance management and do to a certain extent, reflect reality of many citizens. In spite of that, by 2007, tabloid critics were still sceptical of their value in society, say Wigston (2007:52). According to Wigston (2007:52), tabloids carry “inflammatory headlines, blatant sexism and xenophobia.” Wigston (2007:52) continues that tabloids disregard media ethics, thus resulting in lower quality news and an equally low regard for human rights. This researcher would like to find out during interviews with tabloid journalists whether they believe this criticism is valid.

Rabe (2005) chastises tabloids saying they carry on as if they have a “licence to kill” despite the fact that the companies they belong to have social responsibility policies. For instance, this researcher would like to move to elaborate that one of the ways media companies carry out social responsibility policies is through reaching out to communities that experience natural disasters. Nevill (2017) writes that after the fire that ravaged shacks in Imizamo Yethu informal settlement in Houtbay, Media24 donated clothing items to Imizamo Yethu residents. According to Nevill (2017), Media24’s corporate social responsibility has a budget that makes provision for assistance in communities that experience natural disasters and unexpected crises. According to Rabe (2005), media companies carry out their social responsibility policies through “good deeds projects” but turn a blind eye to the actions of their media products. However, Wasserman (2005:34) moves to clarify that tabloids such as the *Daily Sun*, are community-orientated and offer free legal advice from legal experts and offers news from the African continent in brief.

Steenveld and Strelitz (2010:536) add that the *Daily Sun* has social responsibility platforms in the newspaper such as a Mr Fix It³ who helps with household repairs such as electrical or plumbing issues. In some instances, the newspaper has mobilised communities to come together to help fellow readers who experience difficulties in certain aspects of their lives, say Steenveld and Strelitz (2010:536).

According to Jones *et al* (2008:181), at first glance, the *Daily Sun* may give the impression that it does not report on politics and functions of Parliament. Jones *et al* (2008:181) say the newspaper is filled with trivia of daily hardships of the working class including blocked drains, refuse removal, unemployment issues and hospital systems failing the sick and housing backlogs among others. However, Jones *et al* (2008:181) do note that the *Daily Sun* also shares positive

³ According to the *Daily Sun* editor-in-chief, Reggie Moalusi (2018), Mr Fix It is a community outreach programme that the newspaper has been using since its inception. “It is an initiative that is meant to assist home owners with reasonable repairs at their homes,” says Moalusi (2018).

news especially when there are occasional victories on housing issues and when the police have managed to solve a criminal case. Steenveld and Strelitz (2010:535) observe that the *Daily Sun* offers its readers guidance on how to improve their daily lives and assists its readers where possible.

The founding publisher of the *Daily Sun*, the late Deon Du Plessis, as quoted by Wasserman (2010:102), said service delivery remains a serious political issue that his readers are interested in:

Those who are entrusted with the actual delivery of services to the people dig a hole and leave it there uncovered. Then it rains, the water falls in and a three year old kid falls in and drowns. That's politics, and we are angry about it, we're absolutely in your face about it.

Despite Du Plessis' contention, Wasserman (2010:103) says tabloids do not investigate essential issues that underlie such events and how government policies allow private companies to take shortcuts on building developments. In addition, Robertson (2013) notes that service delivery issues are central to tabloids but such stories are boring. Nevertheless, "how a girl was raped walking 10 minutes to the closest toilet because she had no other option is a story to inflame us. It makes the abstract issue of service delivery real," says Robertson (2013). Jones *et al* (2008:176) say such violence, crime and the police's inability to address such social issues, are stories that get tabloid readers interested and involved.

Wasserman (2010:89) says crime is a social ill that continues to affect tabloid readers and tabloids cover these kinds of stories from a different approach than the mainstream media do. Issues of crime are linked to social class and require the state to address them, says Wasserman (2010:89). However, Wasserman (2010:91) also argues that such stories can lead one to believe the public sphere created by the tabloids is alternative in appearance rather than in substance. Robertson (2013) differs with Wasserman on this view, and says it is better to have media audiences engage in newspaper headlines discourse than have their discourse dominated by reality television shows. Robertson (2013) notes that tabloids get people talking about actual news, "although this is sometimes debatable".

Popović and Popović (2014:15) are of a different view and argue conventional reputable journalism is based on telling various sides of the story and offering an analysis of current affairs while tabloids insist on telling the story through “the appeal of one personal experience”. Robertson (2013) says although tabloid critics and media academics are right to decry the lack of context, nuance and analysis in tabloids, “every journalist needs to be a tabloid journalist” by serving their readers first through news coverage. Robertson (2013) observes that tabloids are not all about superstition and tokoloshes as the tabloid style of reporting finds its way to mainstream media’s online offerings by delivering short and to the point stories. Short and to the point stories, notes Robertson (2013), are a commercial response to the lives of modern day media audiences who lead busy lives. Put differently, this means news has become commercialised. Similarly, print media have commercial motives, says McQuail (2013: 3) adding that print media is “indispensable for commerce; appealing to readers; and the basis of a profitable business for printers”.

2.3.2 Tabloids’ commercial interests

Willies (2010:52) says commercial interests should not temper with journalistic credibility as credibility is the currency of the media empire. According to Willies (2010:52), questionable credibility can be seen as an ethical slip that can do damage that might be out of proportion.

McManus (2009:219) argues that the evolution of journalism towards the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century is marked by economics, “particularly as it interacts with the technological developments, such as the internet, and government policy”. McManus (2009:219) argues that “economics is important to the diagnosis of contemporary journalism’s shortcomings and their solutions”. To increase audience share to ensure profitability, Fourie (2007:368) says everything depends on media content which in turn attracts advertising revenue.

According to Willies (2010:58), when journalists perform their functions, they need not worry themselves with commercial interest although this is not always achievable:

Stories should be for their journalistic merit and not for selling newspapers or gaining larger audience, the belief goes. In reality, of course, this kind of separation is only partly possible, as business and marketing concerns often impinge on what stories are covered, how they are covered, and who covers them.

Tabloid stories are therefore not just judged by their journalistic merit, but also by how well they will increase tabloid circulation figures, argues this researcher. This view is supported by Biressi and Nunn (2008:7), who say the term tabloid is used in a pejorative sense and centres on “commercial profitability”. According to McManus (2009:219), commercialisation of news can be defined as “any action intended to boost profit that interferes with a journalist’s or news organisation’s best effort to maximise public understanding of those issues and events that shape the community they claim to serve”. Fourie (2007:368) says commercialisation of the media puts greater emphasis on “market position and profitability”. In other words, the emphasis is no longer on providing media content to the public but the emphasis is on “marketability and thus popularity of media content,” says Fourie (2007:368).

Skovsgaard (2014:200) says: “Tabloidisation of the news is a term used condescendingly about a decline in journalistic standards driven by the increased commercialisation of the news and hunt for profits – also in the quality press,” not just in the tabloid press only.

Wasserman (2010:103) says although on the surface tabloids may appear to be representing the needs of marginalised sections of society, he insists their motives are still commercially driven. This view is also shared by Matsebatlela (2009:62) who argues that sensationalism is caused by commercialisation and tight competition for readers.

According to Wasserman (2005:34), although the *Daily Sun* claims to be committed to “the man in the blue overall and reporting on people nobody ever heard of,” such sentiments should not be seen as not having commercial interests. It should be noted that the word “man” in “the *man* in the blue overall” also refers to female readers of the newspaper – as indicated by demographics of the readers (see Addendum A).

Steenveld and Strelitz (2010:535) say although tabloids are a form of public communication, they are a commercial response to certain social, political and cultural changes that have modified the relationship between the media and newspaper readers. Bloom (2011) adds: “Tabloids are the newsprint business on steroids.”

According to Popović and Popović (2014:17), there is growing commercialisation of the media in the twenty-first century and even the so-called “serious press” inclines towards sensationalism through superficial treatment of serious topics and giving significant space for entertainment, sport and crime in a way that tabloids would. By comparison, Örnebring and Jöhnson (2004:284) say tabloids still have a market in society as they position themselves in

different ways by focusing on alternative issues and audiences than the ones the journalistic mainstream focus on. Popović and Popović (2014:17) argue that tabloids have in fact become commercialised because the press is in search of bigger circulation figures. The issue of bigger circulation figures is directly linked to commercialisation of news as Ndlovu (2015:126) notes: “A commercial imperative comes with traditional media breaking stories and subsequently attracting advertising in a tough commercial environment.”

Wasserman (2010:170) argues that even the kind of stories that are covered in tabloids and mainstream media, are commercially driven:

Events occurring in the affluent areas of cities, where the middle and upper classes live, are favoured by mainstream media above those happening in poorer areas and events in poorer areas are covered by tabloids. This bias is informed by a commercial model which depends on advertising targeting lucrative readerships.

Popović and Popović (2014:17) suggest tabloids “combine the needs of public opinion with commercial interests”, thus boosting circulation figures. In addition, Popović and Popović (2014:17) argue that in a bid to “accumulate capital”, tabloids resolve to “sensationalist headlines, exclusive photos and unrealistic texts,” to woo readers.

According to Popović and Popović (2014:17), editorial independence, objective and independent editorial policy, media market and independent journalism are “empty sentences” hiding “economic and political power” of media owners who are interested in profit. Skovsgaard (2014:205) agrees, adding that it needs to be noted that the media function under pressure from various angles such as advertisers’ demand to reach a bigger audience through the media and their news outlets. In spite of that, Singer (2006:3) says journalistic independence is a necessary condition in the media environment to ensure journalists uphold the public’s trust in journalism. Tabloid journalism, according to Skovsgaard (2014:205), is a result of commercialised media as a way to “hunt for profit” and argues this is at the expense of “serious journalism”.

In essence, commercialised media put profit above journalistic norms, argues Skovsgaard (2014:205):

This implies that the more influence audience figures have on journalistic work and the more a journalist is focused on profit rather than public service, the more he or she will apply a personalised journalistic style emphasising emotions as well as sensationalist news values.

Wasserman (2006:70) has noted that Du Plessis, first editor of the *Daily Sun*, referred to news as “a commodity” and says that is not surprising because Du Plessis was in the business of making profit through news. According to Wasserman (2006:70), Du Plessis referred to the “democratisation of South Africa as just another business opportunity for news publishers”.

According to Wasserman (2006:75), tabloids in South Africa “are all part of commercial conglomerates and it could be expected that their profitability would be higher on [the conglomerates] agendas than increased public deliberation”.

Although tabloid-style of reporting has found its way to online news offerings, Ndlovu (2015:125) notes that compared to “first world” countries, South African media have not yet fully embraced the practice of online journalism. According to Ndlovu (2015:125): “Online journalism in South Africa is still a few years behind. But the situation is changing, as about 12 million people are now consuming online media locally, across various formats (including mobile) and at an increasing pace.” Thus, says Ndlovu (2015:125), succinct stories that were mostly predominant in tabloids, are now available in the so-called serious news media’s online offerings. This raises questions as to whether tabloid journalists have something to offer the so-called serious news media.

2.3.3 Tabloids language use and visual representation

According to Matsebatlela (2009:59), the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* use vulgar language and contemporary township slang of which the meaning can be misinterpreted due to polysemy. Matsebatlela (2009:59) also says the *Sunday Sun*’s language usage in its front page headlines borders on denigrating and offensive language. “Some of the words used are distasteful and downright vulgar,” says Matsebatlela (2009:59).

According to Wasserman (2010:130), local communities appreciate the fact that the *Daily Sun* has a strong local focus. However, the readers have bemoaned lack of stories in their

vernacular saying this is a missed opportunity for the tabloid to serve as a marker of local identity, says Wasserman (2010:130). However, Du Plessis has dismissed the readers' wish for the newspaper to have stories in vernacular as a tired issue and "bullshit"; insisting English brings all different language speakers together, says Wasserman. (2010:130). Yet Madlala (2014:66) says there is lack of language diversity in the print media environment even though readers are hungry for news written in indigenous languages. Madlala (2014:66) says the fact that isiZulu newspapers in KwaZulu-Natal continue to show "phenomenal growth amid dwindling circulations across the board" is evidence that readers are hungry for news written in their own languages. Compared with broadcast media, says Madlala (2014:66), print media has done little to promote language diversity. Madlala (2014:66) says numerous radio stations broadcast in all 11 South African official languages. Furthermore, according to De Araujo (2018), the majority of the tabloid's readers (90%) speak African languages (See Addendum A, Figure 6).

When it comes to visual presentation of news, Steenveld and Strelitz (2010: 536) note that the *Daily Sun* uses "huge colourful headlines, exclamations, italics and capital letters". According to Steenveld and Strelitz (2010:536), this is "shock aesthetics" and sensationalism. Biressi and Nunn (2008:8) note that one of the key elements in tabloid journalism is the use of actual photographs to elaborate a story, especially scandalous stories exposing private lives of those who are in the public eye. Say Biressi and Nunn (2008:8), such pictures are published in a bid to maintain credibility. According to Biressi and Nunn (2008:8), the "emphasis on the visual over the written word in reportage has become symptomatic of the tabloidisation of news media in general".

According to Harber (2011), the *Daily Sun* has carved out a unique South African tabloid journalism style with no page 3 celebrity stories but only "lots of stories of tokoloshes and other weird and wonderful things". In the same vein, Matsebatlela (2009:55) who conducted empirical research on the *Daily Sun*'s page 3 stories and the coverage of black celebrities in the South African tabloids, found that out of the 20 editions he analysed, the tabloid only carried celebrity stories in 5% of its editions.

Matsebatlela (2009:55) says the following about page 3 stories: "Page 3 is often the most important page on the inside of a newspaper as the reader often sees it first after turning over the front page of the newspaper."

In his study, Matsebatlela (2009:55) found that out of the 20 editions he studied, the *Sunday Sun* featured celebrity stories on page 3 only in 25% of the editions studied. Although

Matsebatlela's study found that the *Daily Sun* carried 5% celebrity stories on page 3, it is worth noting that the daily has a supplement called "Sun Buzz", which the tabloid publishes daily. The supplement contains entertainment and celebrity news, ranging from stage plays and television shows to music reviews.

Although the *Daily Sun* targets stories about the working class, Matsebatlela (2009:55) notes that the tabloid has not shied away from reporting on celebrity news. According to Matsebatlela (2009:55), the *Daily Sun* featured black celebrities in only 30% of their front page blurbs. Although the analysis by Matsebatlela is limited to page 3 and front page stories, anecdotal evidence shows the tabloid continues to write about celebrities on other pages within the newspaper. This study will also explore the theme of tabloid content presentation not only on page 3, but across the entire newspaper, with a specific focus on how tabloids navigate around issues of privacy of individuals.

2.4 Journalists talking about their societal roles

The media is seen as one of the key factors in strengthening democracy and societal development. According to Bolin (2006:16):

The media has a democratic mission given to them primarily by the public. This mission includes serving the people with sufficient information, informing politicians about problems of society, to comment on what is going on in society, to act as the so-called watchdog by scrutinising people with power including political and business leaders and to encourage communication between political leaders and other various sectors of society.

De Beer, Malila, Beckett and Wasserman (2016:44) agree that the media's role includes monitoring and scrutinising political and business leaders in fulfilling the media's watchdog role. Similarly, Wasserman (2010:161) says although tabloid journalists lean towards entertainment and gossip, they do take their social responsibility role seriously. According to Wasserman (2010:161), they take their role seriously by balancing the traditional nature of tabloid stories with the role of "information provider", community advocacy and speaking truth to power on behalf of the citizens. Similarly, in a study conducted by Deuze (2005:866) in Amsterdam, tabloid

journalists said they see themselves as “‘regular’ journalists, even though they would readily admit that what they do and the way they do it is not generally considered to be anything like ‘regular’ journalism”.

Although the study by De Beer *et al* (2016:44) was not aimed at only tabloid journalists, the majority of journalists who took part in the study, mentioned “being a watchdog of society or fulfilling some sort of watchdog role” as part of their major responsibility. According to Beer *et al* (2016:46), journalists in South Africa view the watchdog role as “related specifically to monitoring government and public institutions and to exposing corruption, misspending of public funds and abuse of those public institutions by public officials”.

Questions around the watchdog role of the media in society will also be part of this study as this researcher will seek to understand how journalists at the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* specifically describe their role when it comes to monitoring those in power, for instance.

Krüger (2004:3) emphasises that journalism is about public service, saying when journalists ask tough or embarrassing questions, they are not doing so for themselves but on behalf of the public whom they serve. Krüger (2004:3) further says there is a link between journalism and democracy: “Citizens can exercise their democratic rights only if they are fully informed.”

When it comes to the media’s role of being providers of information, according to De Beer *et al* (2016:48), journalists feel if they expose wrongdoing in society, then their watchdog role is fulfilled, thus, “their role in supporting national development was fulfilled – though in different ways”. Say de Beer *et al* (2016:48):

One journalist felt that journalists in South Africa are supporting national development and deepen democracy by ‘holding government accountable. I think that is an important aspect of development too. I think that is a role the media can play, to hold government to account to the task at hand’.

Wasserman (2010:168) says tabloid journalists believe their publications “must also contain serious journalism” such as exposing police brutality whilst also publishing news on music and other entertainment news. According to Wasserman (2010:168), the *Daily Sun*’s brief news on the African continent is done in an educational manner such as showing where in the map certain news events on the African continent took place. Wasserman (2010:168-169) says that “the

professional identity of tabloid journalists premised on their view that mainstream journalism has lost its sense of purpose” and that it is up to tabloid journalists to reconnect the media with people in poor communities.

Although journalists generally have a greater role to play in society such as playing a watchdog role, tabloid journalists, according to Deuze (2005:874), avoid “confronting issues like the objectivity or ethics of certain news-gathering and storytelling practices”. Although this is the case in Amsterdam, Skovsgaard, Albaek, Bro and Vreese (2013:31) who conducted their study on tabloid journalism in Denmark, found that 45% of their respondents said it is very important for journalists to be as objective as possible in their work. Deuze (2005:879) says “ethics, credibility and trustworthiness” are prominent virtues that tabloid editors hold dear in their work and in “various ways in which they give meaning to what they do”.

In the South African context, tabloid editors and journalists speak about “the norms of truth and accuracy as their primary concern – probably because these had been among the aspects they had been criticised for most by their mainstream counterparts,” says Wasserman (2010:167). Writing about tabloids’ ethical norms, Wasserman (2010:159) says:

The editors as well as journalists working at the South African tabloids consistently emphasised that they take their ethical responsibility seriously and felt offended by the criticism to the contrary that they had received from mainstream journalists and media commentators. ‘Truth’ and ‘accuracy’ were the ethical values that featured most prominently in journalists’ discussion of their roles, even when reporting on the private lives of celebrities.

2.5 The role of media ethics in tabloid journalism

It is clear from the discussions about the media’s role in society above, that media ethics remains central not only to mainstream media but to tabloid journalism as well. This is more so because tabloids do not only report issues affecting their readers but also on private lives of those who are in the public eye. According to Wilkins and Brennen (2004:298), academic work interrogating media ethics is rare, tends to be abstract and focuses on whether codes have existed in particular times and places.

2.5.1 Defining media ethics

Keeble (2009:15) says media ethical codes put emphasis on public interest, the public's right to know and freedom of expression. He adds that these serve as a collective conscience of the journalism profession (Keeble, 2009:15). Retief (2002:35) defines ethical codes in the following manner:

A code of ethics is a document that sets out guidelines aimed at prescribing certain types of conduct deemed unethical, and identifying other types of conduct as being ethical. A code of ethics is not a legal document. It derives its legitimacy from the voluntary acceptance of the document by every worker, of course. This implies that journalists subject themselves to the code and be willing to be guided (and corrected if necessary) by the code. It also means that the code is more binding than mere personal or societal values.

Retief (2002:35) says: "Most professions have some sort of code to give ethical direction to the profession and to serve as the conscience of the worker as an individual and of the organisation as a whole." However, Retief (2002:35) does state that journalism ethics cannot be equated to those in the legal and medical fields as those are enforced by licencing bodies.

Oosthuizen (2014:6) says media ethics is enlightened by what society expects from the media and emphasis is placed on professional conduct. This then leads to a development of code of conduct by members of the media who adhere and self-administer the code voluntarily, says Oosthuizen (2014:6). According to Krüger (2004:3), ethics help societies to resolve conflict and establish a set of common values which society lives by. Wilkins and Brennen (2004:299) add that scholarly studies of codes can provide insight into the specific stresses and strains on the profession.

2.5.2 The ethical responsibilities of journalists

Boeyink and Borden (2010:3) say “there is nothing more to journalism ethics than doing journalism well”. According to Boeyink and Borden (2010:3), a journalist should be able to find information efficiently and know how to authenticate it so they can guarantee the accuracy and thoroughness of the content. Boeyink and Borden (2010:3) argue that “journalists can be skilful and yet fail to perform good work if they do not also do their jobs with moral excellence”. According to Boeyink and Borden (2010:3), “moral excellence consists of performing ethical responsibilities well”. Foreman (2010:6) adds that unethical journalists damage the reputation of the profession. Foreman (2010:6) advises journalists to always remember that their job is to inform their readers through being good and resourceful journalists who get their stories published.

Rabe (2005) accuses tabloids of having a “complete disregard of responsibility towards society and individuals, some of this media are a law unto themselves”. Similarly, Wilkins and Brennen (2004:300) charge that the “high calling of journalism has been tarnished because newswriters have been pressured by their employers to serve special interests rather than the public good”.

Shepperson and Tomaselli (2002:279) argue that ethics have a great impact on how news consumers view the media as the application of ethics helps boost media credibility and maintaining news consumers’ confidence. According to Wilkins and Brennen (2004:300): “Journalists need to frame their work based on a mission of social responsibility. They can do so by striving for integrity in their reportage of news and by refusing to distort or suppress the news.”

The role of media ethics in tabloid journalism and what tabloid journalists believe to be ethical expectations by society are some of the cornerstones of this academic inquiry.

Emanating from the reflection and discussion of media ethics above, it is clear that there is a code of conduct and/or guiding principles that the media in general, including tabloids, need to adhere to. Thus, say media academics, there are basic guiding principles for journalists to consider in their pursuit of news (Christian & Nordenstreng, 2004:22; Krüger, 2004:12; Ward, 2005:12; Wasserman, 2006:83).

Christians and Nordenstreng (2004:21-23) say there are three basic principles in terms of ethical journalism and list them as human dignity, truth and nonviolence. Retief (2002:38 – 44) identifies ten basic guidelines that form part of most ethical codes for the media.

For the purposes of this study, this will focus on truth-telling, accuracy and upholding human dignity by respecting the privacy of individuals. The latter is especially pertinent to this study of tabloid journalism at the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun*.

2.5.2.1 Telling the truth

The principle of truth-telling as espoused by Retief (2002:39), Christians and Nordenstreng (2004:22) as well as Krüger (2004:12) calls for the media to report news truthfully. The South African Press Council (2013:13 -14) agrees, stating:

The press shall take care to report news truthfully, accurately and fairly. Only what may be reasonably true, having regard to the sources of the news, may be presented as fact, and such facts shall be published fairly with due regard to context and importance. Where a report is not based on facts or is founded on opinion, allegation, rumour or supposition, it shall be presented in such manner as to indicate this clearly.

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014:58) say the truth is not always easy to detect and comes about as a result of a lengthy process:

The truth is a complicated and sometimes contradictory phenomenon, but if it is seen as process over time, journalism can get at it. First by stripping information of any attached misinformation, disinformation, or self-promoting bias and then by letting the community react, in the sorting-out process that ensues. As always, the search for the truth becomes a conversation.

According to Christians and Nordenstreng (2004:22), the truth is crucial in journalism. Retief (2002:39) says “it goes without saying” that news must be reported truthfully. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014:135) say: “Everyone in the journalistic process has a role to play in the journey

towards truth.” According to Krüger (2004:12), journalists must seek the truth “and report it as fully as possible”. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014:136) say that journalists need to be committed to the truth as a first principle and must be loyal to citizens above all so that citizens can engage with the truth and make up their minds about news presented to them. This is more so, say Boeyink and Borden (2010:43), because professional journalists are in the business of communication, “traffic in the truth” and if “we cannot live up to that ethical norm, we have no value as journalists”. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014:114) add: “If those doing journalism are truth seekers, it must follow that they be honest and truthful with their audience, too – that they be truth presenters.”

According to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014:114), when journalists report on incidents they did not witness themselves, it is crucial that they reveal as much as possible. This process includes journalists disclosing “how they know what they know and who their sources are,” say Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014:114). This is called “the spirit of transparency,” say Kovach and Rosentiel (2014:114).

From the literature reviewed above it appears as though the truthfulness of some of the tabloid articles, i.e stories on tokoloshes, could be called into question by some media critics.

2.5.2.2 Accuracy

The Press Code (2013:14) states the following about accuracy in section 1 subsection 1.7 and section 2 subsection 2.6:

Where there is reason to doubt the accuracy of a report and it is practicable to verify the accuracy thereof, it shall be verified. Where it has not been practicable to verify the accuracy of a report, this shall be stated in such a report. A publication shall make amends for publishing information or comment that is found to be inaccurate by printing, promptly and with appropriate prominence, a retraction, correction or explanation.

Boeyink and Borden (2010:3) say “journalists should test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error”. It is against this backdrop that this researcher will engage with tabloid journalists on how they verify the accuracy of all the stories they write.

Verifying facts is the “central function” of journalism, assert Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014:99-100) adding that journalistic process of verification must do due diligence to the truth and accuracy as the two cannot be detached from each other. According to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014:292), this is because journalists have a responsibility towards citizens:

Citizens have the right to expect that the evidence of the integrity of the reporting be explicit. This means that the process of verification – how newspeople made their decisions and why – should be transparent. Citizens should be able to judge the value and bias of the information for themselves.

As stated above, accuracy is central to journalism and the media need to always take into account that verifying facts is part of journalism and if the media is not able to verify facts, it needs to state so in its reporting.

2.5.2.3 Respecting human dignity and privacy

Claassen (2005:131) says “journalists have become, despite their role as watchdogs against corruption and political mismanagement, in the eyes of many people, nothing more than voyeurs peeping into private lives of the public”.

Christians and Nordenstreng (2004:21) say the media ought to respect human dignity and privacy of all human beings. According to Christians and Nordenstreng (2004:21), this is so because dignity and privacy are inherent values that cut across various cultural traditions which “reaffirm human dignity in a variety of ways as human beings have sacred status without exception”. Christians and Nordenstreng (2004:22) say all people, regardless of their social class, gender, religious beliefs, age and ethnicity, have sacred status: “This common sacredness of all human beings regardless of merit or achievement is the shared commitment out of which we begin to generate notions of a just society.”

The South African Press Code (2013:15) concurs, emphasising that indeed human dignity needs to be treated with care when reporting news and the press must pay special attention to dignity or reputation of individuals. An individual’s right to privacy may only be overridden by a legitimate public interest.

The value for human dignity is closely related to the respect for individuals' privacy – whether they are in the public eye or are private citizens. With tabloids writing about a number of topics on human beings in their publications, this researcher will seek to understand how tabloid journalists navigate around the issue of human dignity in their reporting.

The publication of details about celebrities' private lives need to be in the public interest, as argued in Chapter 1. In defining public interest, Retief (2002:160) says: "Reporting on crime, corruption, mispending of public money are examples of the right to invade someone's privacy in order to serve the overwhelming public interest." Similarly, Wilkins and Brennan (2004:300) argue that invasion of a public figure's privacy "should be avoided unless public interest warrants such intrusion and editors are counselled to refrain from publishing unofficial charges affecting reputation or moral character without giving the person the opportunity to defend him/herself".

Although in South Africa the freedom of the press is enshrined in the Constitution as stated in Chapter 1, Chama (2015:105) argues that the boundary between privacy and press freedom is difficult to establish. In addition, Chama (2015:105) says it is difficult to find the balance in the field of tabloid journalism, especially as privacy and press freedom relates to public interest.

On the other hand, Keeble (2001:58) argues that even though it is difficult to find the balance, politicians and celebrities anticipate frequent publicity as an inescapable part of their daily lives. "Most celebrities and politicians desire publicity and are willing to divulge information about their private lives during media interviews," says Keeble (2001:58). Furthermore, Turner (2004:8) says that interactions of those in the public eye with the media is no longer based on their achievements in politics or in sport, and start to expose their private lives to the media, that is when they become celebrities, and lose their privacy. Therefore, argues Keeble (2001:58), they should not complain when they receive bad publicity. Chama (2015:109) similarly argues that being in the public eye "exposes harm in private affairs, which might have remained hidden if one had been an ordinary individual".

Chama (2015:109) says tabloid journalists are justified to write about personal affairs of those in the public eye because "their private activities might attract public interest". Keeble (2001:58) advises journalists that if there is "genuine public interest which cannot be exposed in any other way than intrusion," journalists need to consider whether there are no other ways of minimising the impact of the story on the innocent such as children and vulnerable groups attached to the individual whose actions are being exposed.

Keeble (2001:58) elaborates that such negative publicity may be justified if for instance, a celebrity flourishes on “squeaky clean” image in the media, but in private, they are found to be abusing children, and as a result, an exposé on such a celebrity is justified to highlight their hypocrisy. According to Keeble (2001:58), this is a classic example of public interest where the media is justified to invade someone’s privacy.

Oosthuizen (2014:190) poses the following question: “If one accepts that privacy can be invaded when and if it is in the public interest, where should we draw the line drawn? Sometimes media practitioners go too far.” According to Rabe (2005), “it’s time for the media to say, ‘we need to draw the line’”. Rabe (2005) also says that the dignity of the people whom tabloids write about, need to be acknowledged.

Keeble (2001:59) says the following about privacy: “The privacy issue becomes confused when ‘public office’ comes to include everyone from teachers, soldiers and police officers. Stories of teachers eloping with school-children” [are part of news] that are justified exposés – behind these “titillating exposés, is a reactionary moral agenda, condemning any behaviour that threatens conventional ‘family values’”.

According to Boeyink and Borden (2010:3), journalists need to recognise that ordinary people “have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone’s privacy”. Even when there is an overriding public interest, Rabe (2005) advises that editors need to look at the importance of the story before publishing it. After looking at the importance of the story, tabloids need to ensure individuals in the story are protected by maximising the truth and minimising harm, says Rabe (2005). However, according to Chama (2015:109), although the “minimise harm” principle remains a guiding principle for the media, “very often sensationalism and the rush for scoops tend to push tabloid journalists into gross breaches”.

On the other hand, Matsebatlela (2009:88) argues that tabloids should not only focus on the negative aspect of celebrities but also deliberately cover celebrity news with a positive angle such as celebrities’ achievements including celebrities who are living healthily with HIV/AIDS. According to Matsebatlela (2009:88), by writing positive celebrity stories, journalists will provide society with positive role models.

Deuze (2005:875), who interviewed tabloid editors and asked them to define the world celebrity in their own words, says tabloid editors define a celebrity as:

Someone successful, rich, living their private life in the public eye, while the serious-popular journalists also consider the ‘normal’ individual as a celebrity the moment he or she becomes an actor on the pages of their magazine such as popular Big Brother or Idols candidate, for example. When these celebrities breach the fine line of civil morality, particularly regarding how we ought to behave in society regarding sexuality, religious practices and life politics, they will receive negative publicity.

This researcher would argue that the old adage that “a picture is worth more than a thousand words” is true for tabloids too – especially when private lives of those in the public eye are exposed. A cursory glance at tabloids in South Africa shows that if there is a picture of a celebrity which best illustrates the story, such a picture is used to corroborate what sources allege happened. For instance: In a story on actress Sophie Ndaba in the 12 March 2017 edition of *Sunday Sun*, the story details that the actress had a “nose job” done. (Nyaba, 2017a: 1). The tabloid then published Sophie’s face pictures with before and after pictures showing clearly that indeed the actress’ nose has been surgically altered.

2.6 Summary

This chapter reviewed literature on tabloid journalism by focusing on the nature of tabloid journalism not only in South Africa but also some other parts of the world. The praise for and criticism against the nature of tabloid journalism was reflected upon and various opposing views juxtaposed against each other. Where various media scholars agree on what tabloid journalism ought to achieve in society was also discussed. Such opposing views ranged from the creation of alternative public sphere and exposing government maladministration in the deepening of democracy to the perceived reputational damage of journalism profession by the practice of tabloid journalism, among others.

The issue of privacy versus public interest was discussed in detail and various arguments on what constitutes public interest were ventilated together with how other scholars argue that the phrase public interest remains vague. The importance of privacy as highlighted in the ethical codes

necessitated a deeper look at public interest. The discussion of media ethics showed that tabloid journalists still have a role to play in administering of reputable journalism practice as society expects the media to fulfil not only the role of providing information but also for the media to function as watchdogs.

Journalistic principles relating to this study were also discussed and a link was made to their relevance to this study. The discussion of the principles was jointed with the broader research objective of this study and how they will assist this researcher to answer his research questions.

In Chapter 3, the study's theoretical framework will be discussed.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

3.1 Introduction

Situated within the field of journalism studies, this study combines the normative theory of media social responsibility and the theoretical concept of an alternative public sphere to explore the views of journalists at the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun*.

“Journalism studies use detailed consideration of activities specific to journalism and logical reconstruction of their relations with the wider field of historically specific human activity,” say Calcutt and Hammond (2011:169). Journalism referred to here is the intensive activity of reporting and commenting on current human activity, distributed in well-crafted forms for the benefit of others who are involved in different professions and activities (Calcutt & Hammond, 2011:169). Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009:3) say we study journalism because news shapes the way we see the world, ourselves and each other. According to Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009:3), journalism studies “play a key role in shaping our identities as citizens, making possible the conversations and deliberations between and among citizens and their representatives so essential to successful self-governance”.

In this chapter the theory of social responsibility is discussed to show how it relates to the media’s function in society. According to this theory, there are certain normative values that the media ought to adhere to and that the public may expect from the media, says Oosthuizen (2014:36). The chapter also defines the theory of the public sphere and discusses what the requirements for a legitimate public sphere are. This researcher further distinguishes between “the bourgeois public sphere” (Mazibuko (2009:21) and an alternative public sphere which has developed in reaction to the serious news media’s marginalisation of the working class (Örnebring and Jönsson, 2004:285). A thorough exploration of available literature has indicated that there is a need to enhance democracy by catering for the needs of the poor through affording them a chance and space for them to discuss issues relevant to them. As argued in Chapter 2, the South African media remain marked by race and social class. Thus, the need for an alternative public sphere is identified to ensure an equal chance of representation is afforded to everyone in the media space.

3.2 Central theoretical departure point

The central theoretical departure point of this study is that tabloid journalists have a social responsibility to create an alternative public sphere that caters for readers who have been neglected by the so-called serious news media. It stands to reason that since serious news media arguably only cater for and address the needs of the middle class, tabloids ought to cater for and address the needs of the working class, referred to herein as the alternative public sphere

In order to establish how journalists at the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* view and describe their responsibilities, this study will make use of social responsibility theory and the public sphere theory. Furthermore, this researcher will distinguish between “bourgeois public sphere” (McGuigan, 2005:430), and “alternative public sphere” (Mustapha, 2012:35) and how tabloids cater for this readership.

3.3 Social responsibility theory

McQuail (2010:571) says media social responsibility involves unwritten obligations (namely truth and justice) towards society. Media audiences who form part of society are understood to be beneficiaries of press freedom (McQuail, 2010:571). Oosthuizen (2014:36-37) states that in terms of social responsibility theory:

The media should accept certain responsibilities towards society, including setting professional standards for the supply of information and the truth, accuracy, objectivity and the balance of their reporting. Furthermore, the media should avoid publishing information that could lead to violence or social disruption, or information that could offend ethnic or religious minorities. [Furthermore, the media need to] collectively reflect a diversity of content to ensure public access to a variety of viewpoints, and their right to react to these viewpoints.

McQuail (1987:117) says the media need to operate within the parameters that enhance civil order. On the issue of minority rights, McQuail (2005:205) says in many countries, “there is legal and social pressure on the media to be positive towards minorities of all kinds, including ethnic groups, women, gays and lesbians, and more sensitive to the needs of vulnerable groups such as children,

the poor, disabled and homeless people, and the mentally ill”. McQuail (2010:205) further says the media need to observe social norms in terms of what is broadly accepted in society. In the same vein, the media should avoid causing grave public offence (McQuail, 2010:205).

Yet, many minority groups or powerless sections of society, share a collective fate: relative invisibility in the media and degrading stereotypes, says Cilliers (2008:334). According to Cilliers (2008:334), the media also portray various minorities such as racial, ethnic, sexual, religious and political minorities differently in comparison to racial, ethnic, sexual, religious and political majorities. The print media add to the depiction of minorities as “strange”, “different” and “other”, says Cilliers (2008:339). Cilliers (2008:339) adds that society is constructed in such a way that those who are and or look different from what is perceived as “normal”, are therefore constructed as the “other”.

Fourie (2007:195) says public service broadcasting in South Africa serves as a great example of the media’s social responsibility. According to Fourie (2007:195), public service broadcasting should:

Foster the provision of an impartial space for free expression and open debate. Also provide audiences with information that will allow them to participate fully in their societies. Also, public service broadcasting should be free of commercial pressures (advertising) and therefore address audiences first and foremost as citizens and not as potential consumers.

This researcher is fully cognisant of the fact that his study is about tabloid journalism, and not public service broadcasting as suggested by Fourie. Nevertheless, there are similar normative values that can still apply to tabloid journalism for the purposes of this study.

Similarly, McQuail (1987:123) says: “Media should exist primarily for their audiences and not for media organisations, professionals or the clients of the media.” Christians and Nordenstreng (2004:3) say instead of enabling government or business interests, the media have a duty to serve society first. In fact, say Christians and Nordenstreng (2004:3):

Responsible journalism does not strengthen the government in power, nor does it insist merely on the individual right to publish and make profit. The press must

remain free from government and business pressure and serve society instead.

Socially responsible news is defined by its duties to the community.

According to McQuail (1987:116), in a case where the media is privately owned, journalists and editors are not only responsible to consumer and shareholder, but also to society at large. McQuail (1987:116) argues that the media perform an important role in society, especially in the supply of information, matters of culture and making provision for diversity of views. According to McQuail (1987:116), the media need to be independent and follow a set of professional ethical norms and values in order to fulfil the role of being the supplier of information and making provision for diversity of views in society. In essence, media social responsibility theory posits that there are three divergent principles, namely: “of individual freedom and choice; of media freedom; and of media obligation to society” (McQuail, 1987:116).

In the South African context, Wasserman (2006:76) says the media’s role is associated with a prevailing human rights discourse, constitutional guarantees and the assumption of a free market environment. In the free market environment, says Wasserman (2006:76), the media accept to act responsibly in the public interest, free from government interference. Wasserman (2006:76) argues that the transition from apartheid South Africa to a democratic South Africa has shown that although political and legal environments are important for free media, the media need to show a commitment to work towards democratisation, tolerance and transformation.

To work towards democratisation, tolerance and transformation, Wasserman (2006:83) says there are revised requirements for a normative framework for the South African media. Wasserman (2006:83) says the revised requirements for a normative framework can be condensed on the basis of the current limitations of the media. Thus, says Wasserman (2006:83), three central norms can be identified: (a) The media’s role in surveillance of power – both political and economic, locally and globally; (b) The media’s role in the affirmation and renegotiation of cultural identity; (c) The media’s role in the transformation of society and redress of inequalities inherited from apartheid.

Of these three norms identified by Wasserman, the affirmation and renegotiation of cultural identity is especially relevant to this study as this arguably relates directly to the readership tabloids cater for. “A postcolonial media theory would serve as a counter-discourse to the prevailing western conceptions of what constitutes ethical conduct for the media,” says

Wasserman (2006:86). As an example, this would mean the media would incorporate African value systems and seek to highlight dominant cultural assumptions underlying African culture, says Wasserman (2006:86). For the same reason, “within their overall task for society, the media should respond to wishes and needs of their audiences,” says McQuail (1987:119). “In so doing, it would assert the agency of African subjects as cultural response to western discourses” (Wasserman, 2006:86).

According to Wasserman (2006:86), those in positions of power, either through colonisation or otherwise and the subaltern should be afforded space to speak, not in a paternalistic fashion, but on their own terms. According to McQuail (1987:117-118), this would ensure the media as a whole is pluralistic and reflects the diversity of the society they serve by giving access to various points of view and to the right of reply. When such a space is afforded, a reductionist binary discourse of colonised versus coloniser should be avoided in favour of social cohesion, says Wasserman (2006:86). This researcher would argue that tabloids giving a voice to sections of society who have been marginalised by mainstream media ensures plurality of views in the media space in general and makes provision for an alternative public sphere.

A thorough literature review on the application of the social responsibility theory in media and journalism studies has indicated that, at the time of writing, there was a limited amount of academic literature available on this topic – especially in the South African context. Some of the most salient studies are discussed below.

The need for journalists to subscribe to social responsibility theory is emphasised by Singer (2006:5) who says although the press enjoys press freedom in constitutional democracies, there is an ethical need to use freedom in a socially responsible way. Singer’s study explores the virtual world in the modern day where anyone can publish information on the internet such as on social media platforms and blogs. This researcher argues that since social media users and bloggers can publish any information at the click of a button, and can do so with impunity, there is a need for journalists to distinguish themselves from the rest. According to Singer (2006: 7), journalists have sought to distinguish themselves from other information sources by emphasising their commitment to fairness and balance. In today’s world of information overload, it means there is a greater need for trustworthy sources which is why journalists need to be trustworthy, says Singer (2006:13).

Singer (2006:13) argues that everyone can be a publisher, but that does not make every publisher a journalist. “Professional journalists increasingly will be defined by the degree to which

they choose to adhere to the normative goals of their professional culture,” (Singer, 2006:13). The heart of journalism is underpinned by socially responsible journalism through a combination of volunteering to be responsible in order to fulfil a social role based on trust, argues Singer (2006:13).

Pitout and Ndlovu (2001:19) used the normative framework of social responsibility theory to establish whether the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) drama series *Yizo Yizo* has violated the principles of the social responsibility theory by broadcasting television programme which has led to crime, violence or social disruption. Pitout and Ndlovu (2001:21) note that the objective of the show was to create awareness of and stimulate debate about the state of learning and teaching in South African schools and to educate young people on issues relating to crime and violence. “[The show] provided viewers with the realistic portrayal of grim events that happen every day in township schools such as girls being raped, boys carrying guns, the abuse of alcohol by students and teachers, and the manhandling of innocent school children by bullies” (Pitout and Ndlovu, 2001:22).

In evaluating the drama series on SABC 1, Pitout and Ndlovu (2001: 23) found that the show did have negative effects especially on school children. According to Pitout and Ndlovu (2001:23), after the first episode of *Yizo Yizo* was broadcast, the show developed “cult followers” amongst mainly black youth. “Copycat gangs have sprung up acting out scenes in *Yizo Yizo* with sickening detail. In Orange Farm, south of Johannesburg, a gang calling itself *Yizo Yizo* has been terrorising the community,” say Pitout and Ndlovu (2001:23). The show caused a stir amongst television viewing public with thought leaders and Cabinet ministers calling for the show to be canned arguing it advanced a moral decay agenda, say Pitout and Ndlovu (2001:21)

Despite this outrage, the show did not only have negative effects in society, there were positive effects too, say Pitout and Ndlovu (2001:25). Before the broadcast of *Yizo Yizo*, there was deafening silence around events such as rape, bullying and violence happening in schools, argue Pitout and Ndlovu (2001:25). Such events are now being addressed openly so that children do not have to live in constant fear (Pitout and Ndlovu, 2001:25).

Pitout and Ndlovu (2001:25) say the issues the show dealt with are complex and the solutions are not quick and easy. According to Pitout and Ndlovu (2001:25), the series did not fall into the trap of making false promises of offering quick solutions to solve such problems. Although Pitout and Ndlovu (2001:26) say in terms of the application of social responsibility theory, the SABC did violate some of the principles of this theory by broadcasting scenes (rape

scenes, bullying scenes and sodomy scenes) which offended a large section of the viewing public, the public broadcaster succeeded in making the public aware of what is really happening in township schools. “It thus fulfilled its social duty to educate and inform the public about important issues in society,” say Pitout and Ndlovu (2001:26).

Although the Pitout and Ndlovu (2001) study is not related to tabloid journalism, there are some lessons to be learnt about the principles of the social responsibility theory. As a result, whether its tabloid journalism, the role of the public broadcaster or the so-called serious news media that engage in content and or news production, the social responsibility of the media cannot be ignored.

Matsebatlela (2009:88) who conducted a study on representation of black female celebrities in South African media, says negative representation of celebrities is likely to have negative consequences on the South African society’s behaviour. Argues Matsebatlela (2009:88): “Any media text plays an important role in shaping aspects of society and culture such as social identities as well as social relations.” Accordingly, argues Matsebatlela (2009:88), tabloids have a social responsibility to generally portray black celebrities in a positive light as this will serve society well by encouraging youngsters to emulate positive behaviour of celebrities, thus creating positive role models. “Media portrayals exert a strong influence on society,” says Matsebatlela (2009:88). Essentially, although Matsebatlela’s (2009) study used theoretical framework of media representation and social constructionism, the study’s findings, recommendations and conclusion as stated above, highlight a need for tabloids to operate within social responsibility theoretical framework.

In another study that explored representation by the media, Pilane and Iqani (2016) conducted a visual data analysis of the South African *Glamour* magazine to analyse issues of beauty and identity. Pilane and Iqani (2016:129) say that in the context of injustice of apartheid regime, black women were “doubly wronged on account of their race and gender”. Although *Glamour* magazine perceive the political and economic expediency in targeting black women, they remain embedded in a racist political-economy that seems unable to shake the belief that whiteness is more valuable (Pilane and Iqani, 2016:136). On the basis of the data gathered for their study, Pilane and Iqani (2016:136) say:

It seems that consumer media producers imagine that black target markets are willing to accept the presentation of a disproportionate number of white role

models, and that the forms of consumption to which they aspire are best visualised through whiteness. Consumer media industry in general values black women mainly as members of a mass market willing to comply with white ideals, and is most willing to include them in media content when they show proximity to white ideals of beauty.

The Pilane and Iqani (2016) study highlights the need for a creation of an alternative public sphere that will celebrate black women's African beauty and or identity. Thus, argues this researcher, the need to give women who subscribe to Afrocentric ideals of beauty a space to celebrate their own idea of beauty is important. This researcher is aware of the fact that the findings of a study on the representation of black women in magazines do not directly reflect the content of tabloids. He would argue, however, that the study by Pilane and Iqani (2016) also calls for the creation of an alternative public sphere that caters for groups traditionally ignored by the mainstream media.

3.4 Public sphere

According to Duelund (2010:26), the public sphere is a term coined in 1961 by German philosopher Jürgen Habermas in his doctoral dissertation titled "The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society". Duelund (2010:27) explains that the term refers to an imaginary public space where people gather to freely discuss socio-political issues in order to influence political action. Mustapha (2012:30) says the public sphere, is a sphere of communicative action through which ideas and identities are formed and consolidated.

In his dissertation, Habermas (1961:21) argues that the public sphere comprises of the bourgeois society who read political journals containing news about the economy, the royalty and special events at courts. According to Habermas (1961:22), when state authorities wanted to address the public, they would make use of the political journals. Such addresses to the public did not reach the common man but only reached the bourgeoisie, say Habermas (1961:22). As a result, adds Habermas (1961:23), the "bourgeois people arose and occupied a central position within the public". According to Habermas (1961:23), the bourgeois consisted of the "capitalists" such as merchants, bankers, entrepreneurs, factory owners and manufacturers.

Despite the concept of the public sphere appearing dated, it has been applied over the years including to more recent studies of journalism and the media.

Mustapha (2012:30) says although the term public sphere refers to a conceptual rather than a physical entity, in the 21st century in Africa, the term transcends coffee shops, salons and the newspapers.

Mazibuko (2009:19) says in the era of multimedia, multimedia platforms have also come to represent a particular public sphere where people air their views. Ideas exchanged through letters to the editor and deliberations over the internet are some of the popular means through which ordinary people channel their ideas in today's world, says Mazibuko (2009:19).

Mustapha (2012:30) says in order for public sphere to be effective, it must "ideally be inclusive and must never close itself off into a clique and access must be as universal as possible". This means that the public sphere must disregard social classes and hierarchies by treating all participants as equals, even though they are obviously not, says Mustapha (2012:30). Fraser (2007:20) says public opinion is indeed considered authentic "if and only if" all who are possibly affected are able to engage as peers in deliberations concerning the organisation of their mutual concerns. Furthermore, says Fraser (2007:20), in order for public opinion to be viewed as legitimate, those who engage in a particular discourse must be afforded equal opportunities to state their views, drive agenda items, question the tacit and implicit assumptions of others. Again, Mustapha (2012:30) argues that the value of contribution must reflect a common commitment to rationality and logic. Equally important is that participants must not be coerced into anything, says Mustapha (2012:30).

Malila (2013:23) says this public space affords citizens an opportunity to participate in debates where citizens attempt to articulate their society's most pressing issues, thus forming a public opinion on contemporary issues.

According to Habermas (2006:716), there are two actors without whom there would be no political public sphere and they are politicians and journalists (including editors). Habermas (2006:716) says that for the media to serve as a public sphere, it needs media professionals to edit the news and commentaries and also needs politicians who occupy the centre of the political system. Politicians have no say in how the media disseminate political message and how the public receives such messages, says Habermas (2006:716). However, it must be noted that in the 21st century, politicians can now directly reach their constituencies through social media. McGuian (2005:430) and Mustapha (2012:35) distinguish between the cultural public sphere and the

alternative public sphere respectively. These two interpretations of public sphere theory will assist this researcher in exploring the social responsibility of tabloid journalism, and consequently to answer the research questions posed by this study.

3.4.1 Cultural public sphere

The cultural public sphere is not confined to writing letters to newspapers, “it includes channels and circuits of mass-popular culture and entertainment” which includes idolising how the public ought to live and imagine the good life”, says McGuigan (2005:433). Therefore, says McGuigan (2005:433):

The concept of cultural public sphere refers to the articulation of politics, public and personal, as a contested terrain through aesthetic and emotional modes of communication. The cultural public sphere trades in pleasures and pains that experienced vicariously through willing suspension of disbelief; for example, by watching soap operas, identifying with the characters and their problems, talking and arguing with friends and relatives about what they should and should not do. The cultural public sphere provides vehicles for thought and feeling, for imagination and disputatious argument, which are not necessarily of inherent merit but may be of some consequence.

McGuigan (2005:433) says the public’s obsession with soap operas which deal with personal crises and the complexity of daily life and relationships continues to captivate viewers the world over. Watching soap operas may be a spontaneous distraction from domestic chores or of pure dedication (McGuigan, 2005:433). According to McGuigan (2005:35), one such example was the death of Diana, Princess of Wales in 1997: “The public’s response was extraordinary in terms of extravagant expressions of grief and loss.”

One such display of “extravagant expressions of grief and loss” in the South African context was arguably present during the death of former struggle icon Nelson Mandela in December 2013. This example is relevant to this study because it is a local example which tabloid

readers most arguably could identify with more especially since Nelson Mandela was the first President of a democratic South Africa.

Pitcher, Frankland and Jones (2016:105) say after the former statesman's death, he was hailed as a "peace icon, freedom fighter, heroic and struggle icon" among other praises. The eventful, heroic life and the death of the first President of a democratic South Africa engendered public outpouring of love and appreciation for Mandela's leadership into a reconciliatory nation known as the rainbow nation, say Pitcher *et al* (2016:106).

McGuigan (2005:433) says the public's obsession with celebrity news including gossip and scandals "actually mask serious cultural concerns and anxieties". According to Mustapha (2012:33), "concern with celebrity lives, along with avid consumption of soaps, music and films generate a world of knowing that is more emotional than cognitive. According to McGuigan (2005:435), edutainment and infotainment make up a significant part of the public sphere.

Mustapha (2012:35) says in South Africa, the debate on public sphere has raised concerns about the effects of racial inequality and new technologies on the democratisation process. Mustapha (2012:35) argues that "there are two South Africas", one which is well resourced and the other poor and marginalised.

This section on cultural public sphere is relevant to this study as this researcher explores social responsibility and the creation of alternative public sphere by the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun*. Thus, cultural public sphere fits in this study because the *Sunday Sun*'s Twitter bio (@SundaySunSA, 2018) describes the tabloid as South Africa's fearless and fastest growing newspaper that is filled with entertainment and celebrity news.

Therefore, argues this researcher, there is a need for the media to cater for the marginalised sections of society by creating an alternative public sphere that caters for those who prefer to read about celebrity lives and their alleged scandals.

3.4.2 Alternative public sphere

Mustapha (2012:35) says in the context of poverty and inequality in South Africa, the media have played an important role, not only as conveyor of information, but also of identities and interests of the different social classes that form part of post-apartheid South African society. As a matter of fact, Fraser (2007:19) points out that the public sphere consists of multiple identities and not a

single identity, i.e the bourgeois society, as first argued in the Habermasian theory of the public sphere.

Although the fall of apartheid in South Africa saw a flare-up of print and electronic media and the access to this by previously marginalised groups, “virtual South Africa” continues to mirror the divisions and inequality of “offline South Africa”, says Mustapha (2012:36). Mustapha (2012:36) adds that this is because majority of South Africans do not have the resources to access the internet due to economic constraints. According to Ndlovu (2015:125), South African media and citizens have not yet fully embraced the idea of online journalism, which is more practiced and accessed in cities such as Johannesburg and Cape Town.

As argued throughout this thesis, tabloids are aimed at the working class and the unemployed whose daily struggles have been ignored by the mainstream media. As shown throughout this study, tabloids have carved out a niche in the newspaper market by giving a voice to sections of society which have been marginalised by mainstream media. The mainstream media has ignored the voices of the majority of South Africans who form part of tabloids readership.

According to Wasserman (2008:4), South African tabloids are creating an alternative public sphere which has long been neglected by the so-called serious news media. Wasserman (2008:4) says tabloids focus on issues of importance to a section of the South African population who are the majority in this country by engaging in sensationalist and emotional mode of address when they afford ordinary people a chance to tell stories and their everyday struggles. Wasserman (2008:4) says the majority referred to herein are the working class. In addition, Wasserman (2008:4) says tabloids provide the working class with a media sphere that they cannot find elsewhere. As cited by Wasserman (2008:8), Du Plessis says readers of the *Daily Sun* prefer stories that concern them directly, rather than big political stories.

Serino (2010:100) says although the transformation of South Africa to a democratic country “ideally should have transformed the public sphere, many factors are at play in constraining and shaping contemporary operations of public deliberation”. Serino (2010:100) says this is so because the so-called serious news media “are privileged sites” for public deliberations as they exclude issues affecting the working class. However, it is not practically possible for print media to provide unlimited space as editors select and exclude certain news items based on a set of ethical norms and practices.

In the case of South Africa’s biggest weekly newspaper, the *Sunday Times*, Serino (2010:104) interviewed senior editors, observed newsroom processes and analysed opinion pages

at the newspaper to learn about the weekly's editorial processes in the production of opinion. Serino (2010:104) found that before editors could publish a contribution in opinion and analysis pages, they look at importance and relevance of the writer; length, quality; and importance of the topic, as defined by news criteria. As explained to Serino (2010: 106), the editor of the *Sunday Times*' "Opinion and Analysis" segment, Fred Khumalo admits "working class people do not have a voice. Especially here. We are very middle class establishment".

This researcher would argue that this study supports the argument that contribution of members of society who are not part of the middle class will not make it into the newspaper such as the *Sunday Times*.

This researcher further argues that Khumalo's assertion proves that print media is very fragmented. This fragmented media space calls for a new conceptualisation of the public sphere – one which is different from the Habermasian ideal public sphere, says Fourie (2010:177).

Based on the literature reviewed above and in Chapter 2, this researcher argues that it is undeniable that an alternative public sphere exists, or should exist; one that is not catered for by mainstream media. The alternative public sphere is mostly the working class who have been neglected by the mainstream media, yet even those living in poverty need to be afforded an opportunity to participate in democratic processes. Says Aars (2007:204):

We cannot conceive of democracy without some form of popular participation. Some believe that democracy is best served when the greatest possible number of people assumes an active role. The substance of political decisions should be the result of varied and unlimited participation. Popular involvement is a necessary source of energy for a democratic system. Without it, the system would ultimately be unable to function. The defining idea of democracy is that it is people who govern their own affairs.

Mazibuko (2009:19) contends that the poor, women and the elderly represent a section of the population in society which are marginalised and therefore excluded from greater debates due to their socio-economic settings. Participants of public sphere debates in rural areas, argues Mazibuko (2009:20), represent the interest of the participants as much as the bourgeois public sphere stated in the Habermasian public sphere model represent interests of its own class.

Mazibuko argues that “Habermas’ initial thinking assumes that there is only one ‘genuine’ public sphere, the urban white male bourgeois one”. According to Mazibuko (2009:20):

People take sides on issues because they have specific interests. It may serve little to no purpose for a poor peasant to want to be part of the class of landlords who debate how best to exploit the poor. But it would serve the poor peasant better to associate with those of the same class in order to discuss and find solutions to their exploitation

The role of tabloids to serve a public sphere that differs from this “urban white bourgeois one”, is discussed by Örnebring and Jöhnson (2004:283). Örnebring and Jöhnson (2004:283) say tabloid journalism in many cases serves the public good. According to Örnebring and Jöhnson (2004:283), tabloid journalism serves the public well by positioning itself, in different ways, as an alternative to the issues, forms and audiences of the journalistic mainstream – that is to say as an alternative public sphere.

In a recent study exploring the possible existence of an alternative public sphere, Dyke-Beyer (2018), sought to explore whether Twitter can be considered a networked public sphere which enhances public debate to deepen democracy. The study used reactions to the Penny Sparrow⁴ incident on Twitter as a case study of conflict around racial identity in post-apartheid South Africa.

According to Dyke-Beyer (2018:115), Habermas’ concept of the bourgeois public sphere cannot be applied to a networked public sphere. Says Dyke-Beyer (2018:116): “Twitter can in some ways, although not definitely, be considered a public sphere which enhances the potential for deliberative democracy.” Thus, says Dyke-Beyer (2018:116), Twitter offers multiple voices a chance to be heard and diverse opinions to be shared.

Although Dyke-Beyer’s study centred on the networked world of the social media platform Twitter, the lessons about the requirements for a public sphere to be considered legitimate, (i.e all participants in a public sphere debate ought to be considered equals) apply across various media

⁴ “Just days after the start of 2016, a post by KwaZulu-Natal estate agent Penny Sparrow caused an outcry on social media. In the post, Sparrow was lamenting the state of beaches after New Year’s Day and compared black people to monkeys,” says Dyke-Beyer (2018:7).

platforms. It is therefore safe to assume that the basic principles of an alternative public sphere is also applicable to tabloid journalism, as explored by this study.

3.5 Summary

This chapter examined the media's role in society by reflecting a discussion on the theories of social responsibility and public sphere. It was discovered that the media's first and foremost responsibility is to their readers. It was also argued that the media's social responsibility is to serve the needs of society. The society that the media need to serve consists of all members of society including populations in society that are in the minority especially the mentally ill, women and children as well as the elderly.

Habermas' structural transformation of the public sphere was discussed and ensuing studies that came about as a result of his seminal work. Although Habermas' theory initially focused on the bourgeois society, various academics have since developed the theory further to take into account social and economic inequalities of the modern world. Thus, a need for an alternative public sphere was identified in order to afford the marginalised an opportunity to engage in public discourse that they can relate to. This is especially important as in order for various public spheres to be legitimate, they need to be inclusive of various voices to ensure the deepening of democracy.

In Chapter 4, this researcher will discuss the research design and methodology employed for this study.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research methodology employed in this study to explore the social responsibility of journalists at the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun*. This study makes use of a qualitative research approach. This research design is relevant because this researcher wants to gain new insights into the tabloids' social responsibility– from the perspective of the journalists working at these newspapers.

As discussed in Chapter 1, this study is exploratory in nature. According to Du Plooy (2009:50-51), exploratory research explores an unknown area of research that can be based on obtaining new insights as part of a pre-test or pilot study; confirm assumptions or to become familiar with unknown situations, conditions, policies and behaviours, amongst other objectives. Babbie (2010:92) adds that exploratory studies are mostly conducted to, amongst other reasons, satisfy the researcher's curiosity and desire for better understanding about a particular phenomenon. Again, exploratory research can be undertaken to understand the existence or nature of human behaviour, or lack thereof, says Vermeulen (1998:7). This researcher explained in Chapter 1 that he is an avid reader of the tabloids being studied. Doing this study is therefore also an attempt to satisfy his curiosity about the role tabloids play in society.

This researcher has chosen to use qualitative research methods to understand various editorial decisions at the tabloids being studied here. Corbin, Strauss and Strauss (2015:4) define qualitative research as a formula of research where the researcher gathers and interprets data, making the researcher as much part of the research process as the research participants and the data they volunteer.

Qualitative research allows the researcher to “produce detailed descriptions of a phenomenon; develop possible explanations for it and to evaluate the phenomenon” (Vermeulen, 1998:13). Although tabloids exhibit many other features that can be subject of academic enquiry (such as the representation of celebrities, and the framing of service delivery issues) the focus of this study is the exploration of the social responsibility of tabloids. Thus, this researcher aims to produce detailed descriptions and analysis of how tabloid journalists view their role in society and what they see as their social responsibility. In the same vein, this researcher would like to produce detailed descriptions and analysis of how tabloid journalists view their role in creating and catering for an alternative public sphere that has been neglected by mainstream media.

This chapter will give a detailed description of what a qualitative research design entails, discuss data sampling and data gathering, which includes semi-structured interviews. This chapter will close with a look at how the data was analysed.

4.2 The qualitative research design

Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011:9) say:

One of the main distinctive features of qualitative research is that the approach allows you to identify issues from the perspective of your study participants, and understand the meanings and interpretations that they give to behaviour, events or objects.

Qualitative research uses language to comprehend ideas based on people's experience and attempts "to create a sense of a larger realm of human relationships" (Brennen, 2013:4). Brennen (2013:14) continues that qualitative researchers endeavour to understand traditions, contexts, usages and meanings of words, concepts and ideas. In this study, this researcher seeks to explore how journalists at two of South Africa's tabloid newspapers view their responsibility towards society. This will be done by seeking to understand traditions and contexts of the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* tabloids in South Africa.

Du Plooy (2009:88) says a qualitative research design is appropriate when the intention is to examine properties, needs and characteristics that distinguish individuals, groups, organisations and events. For the purposes of this study, a qualitative research design will help this researcher to explore social responsibility and the creation of alternative public sphere as phenomena within the context of the tabloids being studied.

It has been established in Chapter 2 that limited research has been done on the social responsibility of tabloid journalists – especially within the South African context.

Brennen (2013:5) explains that qualitative researchers do not only focus on media effects and influences, they also undertake to understand various relationships that exist between media and society. This researcher is especially interested in how tabloid journalists view their relationship with society from an ethical standpoint.

According to Iorio (2004:6), qualitative researchers go into the field to gather data by interacting with people whom they intend to learn from. Iorio (2004:6) explains that qualitative researchers record what they find, analyse and interpret it to show how the world makes sense to those they study. Similarly, Vermeulen (1998:13) says qualitative research is an enquiry that is based on the assumption that people construct social reality in the form of meanings and interpretations, and that these constructions depend on situations which the population being studied operates in.

Wimmer and Dominick (2006:49) say qualitative techniques can intensify the researcher's understanding of a phenomenon. "This is especially true when the phenomenon has not been investigated previously," say Wimmer and Dominick (2006:49). If carefully designed, qualitative research can ensure that focus falls on key issues of the study, say Wimmer and Dominick (2006:49.)

Wimmer and Dominick (2006:49) argue that one of the disadvantages of qualitative research samples is that they are sometimes too small to generalise the data beyond the samples studied. Furthermore, qualitative researchers get too close to their research participants, thus, they risk losing their objectivity when collecting data (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006:49). In addition, Wimmer and Dominick (2006:49) state if qualitative research is not properly planned, the project may produce nothing of value.

This researcher does not aim to generalise the research results to other tabloids. Rather, the aim of this researcher is to produce findings that serve as analysis of these tabloids and to further serve as starting point for further studies on tabloid journalism. To mitigate the shortcoming of producing large quantities of data that might be of no value, this researcher ensured that the questions posed to the respondents related directly to the research questions of this study. To avoid losing his objectivity for the study, this researcher reflected about his position as a researcher and as former journalist during the presentation of findings.

4.3 Sampling and data gathering

According to Du Plooy (2009:109), before drawing a sample, it is important to differentiate between the target population and accessible population. The differentiation between these two types of population has serious effects for research, because the more narrowly the accessible population is defined, the more limited the generalisation of the findings (Du Plooy, 2009:109).

Essentially, the target population for this study consists of all tabloid journalists in South Africa. For this study, the accessible population comprises all the journalists who are employed at Media24's tabloids the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* and that are based at the titles' headquarters in Auckland Park, Johannesburg. Vermeulen (1998:51) says a sample is the element of the population considered for actual inclusion in the study. Thus, the sample for this study is therefore each journalist interviewed.

4.3.1 Purposive sampling

According to Du Plooy (2009:99), data collection involves collecting existing or new data, on the basis of which the research questions can be answered and the research problem investigated. In this research, this researcher will use semi-structured interviews to collect new data.

White (2010:116) says sampling refers to a process of constructing/establishing the sampling frame. This frame is a concrete listing of the elements in the population, in order to identify people to be included in the research to learn more about characteristics of the entire population.

According to Pascoe (2014:134), the purpose of your study and your research approach will play a role in determining sample size. Pascoe (2014:134-135) advises that when choosing a sample, it is important to narrow down the accessible population by "carefully" drawing a sample.

Fowler Jr (2014:15) says a sample is chosen from a group of people who belong to a particular community and possess certain characteristics that enable them to be sampled. Strydom (2011:224) states the following as to why a sample is chosen and not the entire population:

A complete coverage of the total population is seldom possible, and all members of a population of interest cannot be reached. Even if it was theoretically possible to identify, contact and study the entire relevant population, time and cost considerations usually make this a prohibitive undertaking. The use of samples may therefore result in more accurate information than might have been obtained if one had studied the entire population. This is so because, with a sample, time, money and effort can be concentrated to produce better-quality research, better instruments and more in-depth information.

This researcher would have liked to speak to all tabloid journalists in South Africa, but decided to focus on two newspapers for a more purposive sample. The characteristics that the participants in this sample share, are that they are practising tabloid journalists at the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* specifically.

This researcher therefore acknowledges that the findings of his study might only be relevant to the tabloids studied and not to every other tabloid in South Africa. However, he believes that this exploratory study of tabloid journalists' social responsibility could serve as a starting point for further study.

McMillan and Schumacher (1997:397) describe purposive sampling as “selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth when one wants to understand something about those cases without needing to generalise to all cases”. Maree and Pietersen (2014:178) add that purposive sampling is used in exceptional cases where the sampling is conducted with a specific purpose in the researcher's mind.

Firstly, this researcher chose the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* because he wanted to focus on tabloids with high circulation figures to understand the social responsibility of the tabloid journalists studied and the creation of alternative public sphere. Secondly, for the purpose of this study, this researcher seeks to understand how tabloid journalists view their role as journalists and how they navigate around ethical issues when reporting on lives of celebrities and those in the public eye.

Purposive sampling is based entirely on the judgement of the researcher, in that a sample contains elements that contain the most attributes that are representative of the population that best serve the purpose of the study (White, 2005:120; Strydom, 2011:232). This researcher made a judgement on which journalists employed at the tabloids to choose for the study “to provide the best information to address the purpose of the research” (White, 2005:120).

This researcher spoke to senior editors, senior journalists and junior journalists at the tabloids being studied for this research project.

When sampling, it is important to consider the size of the sample because it could be problematic to come to the phase of data analysis and realise the data is too small, and that some of the population subgroup was not sufficiently represented in the sample, says Pascoe (2014:134-135). To avoid such pitfalls, the respondents chosen to be part of this study were ten journalists (including editors) and one photographer.

According to White (2005:120), one of the advantages of purposive sampling is that it gives the researcher the justification to make generalisations from the sample studied to other samples of similar nature. Vermeulen (1998:55) says one of the positives about purposive sampling is that the sample is composed of elements which contain the most characteristics, representative and typical attributes of the population.

According to Fowler Jr (2014:29), one of the concerns about respondent recruitment is that the first interaction with the prospective respondent is critical to enlist cooperation. According to Fowler Jr (2014:29), “if the respondent selection is too cumbersome or feels intrusive, it may adversely affect the rate of response”. Vermuelen (1998:55) says purposive sampling is prone to researcher bias and the judgement of the researcher is prominent in this type of sampling. Nieuwenhuis (2014:88) advises that during participant recruitment processes, the key is to find respondents who are best qualified, in terms of your research questions, to provide you with data required for your study.

To overcome the disadvantages of purposive sampling, this researcher first got the permission of the editor-in-chief of the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun*. The senior editor encouraged his staff to take part in this study. This researcher informed all the research participants that they have an option to opt out of the study during the interviews and even long after the interviews have been concluded. In an attempt to alleviate a feeling of intrusion, the interviews with the respondents happened at their place of work, thus, providing them with a feeling of a sense of security as the interviews happened in their natural habitat. To also do away with researcher bias, this researcher based his decision on which journalists and editors to include by employing well-conceived and well considered criteria. The judgement of this researcher was that junior and senior journalists as well as editors needed to be part of the study to ensure all elements of the population are represented.

4.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

Nieuwenhuis (2014:87) describes an interview as a conversation where the interviewer asks the participant questions to gather data and to learn about ideas, beliefs, views, opinions and behaviours of the participant. The aim of an interview, therefore, is to see the world through the eyes of the participant (Nieuwenhuis, 2014:87).

According to Brennen (2013:28), qualitative interviewing focuses on understanding the meanings of information, opinions and interests in research participants' lives. Says Brennen (2013:28):

Through face-to-face, in-depth guided conversations using semi-structured or unstructured interview questions, qualitative interviewing explores respondents' feelings, emotions, experiences and values within their deeply nuanced inner worlds.

Babbie (2010:318) says qualitative interviews are meant to be an interaction between the researcher and the participant where the researcher has a general plan of enquiry, including topics to be covered, and not a set of questions that must be asked with particular words and in a certain order. For the purpose of this study, this researcher undertook semi-structured interviews to have flexibility when engaging with the participants. Brennen (2013:28) says that semi-structured interviews are based on prepared questions although there is greater flexibility as interviewers may ask follow-up questions to delve more deeply into the issues addressed or to clarify some of the answers given by the participants. In the same vein, Wimmer and Dominick (2006:116) say during interviews, a researcher uses a flexible questioning approach. Although a basic set of questions is designed to start the project, the researcher can change questions or ask follow-up questions at any time (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006:116; Nieuwenhuis, 2014:87). According to Greef (2011:351), asking follow up questions allows the researcher to explore interesting avenues that emerge during the interview process and the participant is able to present a fuller picture. Furthermore, says Greef (2011:352), "semi-structured interviews are especially suitable when one is particularly interested in complexity or process, or when an issue is controversial or personal".

Du Plooy (2009:198) says semi-structured interviews are designed to allow the researcher to understand participants' meaning construction. Greef (2011:351) agrees, adding that indeed semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to gain a detailed understanding of the research participant's beliefs and accounts on a certain topic. According to Du Plooy (2009:198), understanding another person's meaning construction "is an extremely delicate process that requires the interviewer to be very sensitive to respondents' verbal and nonverbal responses". Du Plooy (2009:198) states that during the interview, respondents can respond by saying "I have no

idea”. This, according to Du Plooy (2009:198), requires the researcher to employ aided-recall technique. Du Plooy (2009:198) says aided recall technique involves the interviewer relating certain media content that might help respondents to remember certain events. When this researcher conducted interviews with the journalists, he did use the aided recall technique by reminding some of the research participants certain stories that the newspapers did run with. This researcher used this technique when the journalists were struggling to remember which stories they wanted to give as their examples to answers they were volunteering to the research.

When a participant’s responses is not clear or detailed enough, it will have impact on how the findings are relayed. Greef (2011:351) says:

The researcher must be able to recognise ‘thin’ areas and probe for additional information, to remember all that has developed in previous interviews to make associations and verify assumptions, and to ‘get inside the participant’s skin’ so that the topic may be understood from the participant’s perspective.

According to Greef (2011:352), participants in semi-structured interviews “share more closely in the direction the interview takes and they can introduce an issue the researcher had not thought of”. Therefore, says Greef (2011:352), in this process, research participants are subject experts and should be allowed ample opportunity to relate their experiences and convictions.

The semi-structured interviews for this study were conducted at Media24 offices in Auckland Park, Johannesburg. Reggie Moalusi, editor-in-chief of the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun*, granted this researcher access (See Addendum B) to the newspapers’ newsrooms. This was supplemented by permission from the journalists and editors who signed informed consent forms (See Addendum C). The editors and the journalists also received signed copies of the informed consent form to keep for their record purposes or to use should there be any need to contact the Stellenbosch University, this researcher’s supervisor or this researcher. After this researcher received permission from Moalusi, he also sought and received ethical clearance (See Addendum D) from Stellenbosch University’s Research Ethics Committee (REC) authorising this researcher to go ahead and conduct his study. The clearance was granted to this researcher after having complied with all the ethical requirements set by the university’s REC.

Moalusi gave this researcher a small boardroom to use as his office for the day while conducting interviews. He also assisted this researcher to recruit respondents for the study by mentioning to his newsroom staff what the purpose of this researcher's presence in the newsroom was. He also explained to the staff members that some of them may be approached by this researcher to be part of this study.

When this researcher explained the contents of the consent form including the fact that respondents had the right not to answer certain questions and or to withdraw partly or completely from the study, only one participant out of the total of 11, chose not to answer one specific question. When it comes to withdrawing from the study, all research participants asserted they were committed to assisting this researcher in any way they could to ensure successful completion of this study.

The issue of voluntary participation is especially crucial in any research. As Anderson (2012:229) says: "At the individual level, most research participation has to be enacted on a voluntary basis. People cannot be coerced into participating." Over and above this researcher being granted access to the journalists by Moalusi, this researcher explained the research aims to the participants, such as generating new knowledge on tabloid journalism in South Africa.

According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011:139), when compared with other survey techniques, interviews provide more accurate responses on sensitive issues. Vermeulen (1998:65) says in this type of interviews, the respondent has an opportunity to express his or her own opinions based on their experiences. Vermeulen (1998:63) says the "greatest strength" of semi-structured interviews is that the interview is less formal and this will ensure the participant is relaxed. Furthermore, Vermeulen (1998:63-64) says this type of interview allows the "interviewer to observe the participant for signs of evasiveness and no cooperation".

According to White (2005:142), one of the disadvantages of interviews is that as the researcher continues to interview more participants, there might be sources of invalidity. White (2005:142) says one source of invalidity is that the interviewer tends to improve with experience; thus making the results of earlier interviews different from interviews conducted later on in the research process.

White (2005:143) says one of the great aspects of interviews is that the interviewer can probe for more specific answers and can repeat a question when the response indicates that the respondent misunderstood the question. In addition, White (2005:143) says the response rate in interviews is better than response rate in a mailed questionnaire.

Nieuwenhuis (2014:100) says in qualitative studies, researchers often need to go back to the original data and verify conclusions or return back to the participants to gather additional data and verify it, or to solicit feedback from the participants who took part in the research. According to Vermeulen (1998:63), one of the disadvantages of semi-structured interviews is that they are time consuming and not necessarily cost effective. In addition, Wimmer and Dominick (2006:139) say due to the wealth of the data that interviews produce, a different “researcher given the same body of data taken from an interview may wind up with interpretations significantly different from those of the original investigator”. White (2005:144) says one of the disadvantages of interviews is possible “inconvenience” such as research participant’s reasoning ability being adversely affected by factors such as fatigue, stress, illness or even work deadlines, especially in a newsroom environment.

To mitigate the shortcomings listed above, the researcher treated the participants with sensitivity and respect by respectfully probing their convictions involving the practice of the participants’ craft.

This researcher recorded the interviews on his iPhone after the research participants consented to being recorded. This researcher asked as many relevant questions and follow up questions as possible to ensure that during data analysis the researcher does not have to go back to the participants who might have forgotten the answers they gave this researcher during the interviews. The research participants did, however, consent to be contacted at a later stage by this researcher should a need arise to get more information from them. To give effect to this, this researcher built good rapport with the participants. As such, all the participants declared their support for this researcher and continued to express they are committed to assisting him in any way they can. Furthermore, there were prospective participants who were busy with their professional duties at certain times yet volunteered to be part of the study. This researcher understood their priorities to avoid possible inconveniences and waited for them to meet their deadlines before they took part in the interviews.

Schurink *et al* (2011:402) say after recording the data, the researcher needs to transcribe it in sufficient detail: “Depending on the research questions and design, sometimes a verbatim transcription of recordings is needed and sometimes summative notes on key aspects of conversations may suffice.” After the interviews were recorded, this researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim by playing the interviews from his cell phone and transcribing them sentence

by sentence. In some instances, this researcher listened to participants' responses more than once to ensure he avoids any possible errors.

4.4 Data analysis

Fouché and Schurink (2011:324) say researchers need to consider how they envisage sorting, organising, indexing and analysing their collected data. Furthermore, say Fouché and Schurink (2011:324), another decision researchers need to make is to:

Develop their thinking on how – that is according to what principles and logic – they will formulate and substantiate their claims and analysis. Differently put, they should consider how they are going to ensure they do quality research.

Babbie (2010:39) defines qualitative data analysis as follows: “Qualitative data analysis is the nonnumeric examination and interpretation of observations, for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships.” Similarly, Schurink, Fouché and De Vos (2011:399) say that qualitative data analysis is a process of inductive reasoning, thinking, and theorising and making inferences from empirical data of social life.

Babbie (2010:400) says in order to make sense of data; the researcher needs to code the data. Coding refers to classifying or categorising individual chunks of data by using a retrieval system, says Babbie (2010:400). “If all your notes have been catalogued by topic, retrieving those you need should be straightforward as a simple format for coding and retrieval, you might have created a set of file folders labelled with various topics such as [social responsibility, ethical consideration on privacy],” says Babbie (2010:400). According to Babbie (2010:400), data retrieval means accessing out the [ethical considerations on privacy folder], peruse the notes it contains until you find what you need.

According to White (2005:256), during qualitative data analysis, irrelevant information will be separated from relevant information in the interviews. White (2005:256) adds that the relevant information will be broken into phrases or sentences which reflect a single, specific thought. In addition, Schurink *et al* (2011:402) say researchers need to critically assess the meanings of the words used by the participants by being attentive to choice of words and phrases

by participants' own vocabularies as this captures the meaning of what they do and say. When doing this, advise Schurink *et al* (2011:402), the researcher needs to allow for discovery of any and all possible meanings that may arise.

While analysing the data, Schurink *et al* (2011:402) say researchers need to “identify different topics and code those encountered by means of line-by-line analysis of each interview transcription”. Furthermore, Wimmer and Dominick (2006:117) say after doing so, each piece of information should be coded to identify the research participant. To avoid losing research data, Wimmer and Dominick (2006:117) suggest that multiple photocopies of the notes, transcripts, and other documents should be made.

When analysing, interpreting and presenting data, Schurink *et al* (2011:402) say in order to increase credibility of research conclusions, the researcher needs to:

Identify different themes, look for underlying similarities between them. It is important to note that qualitative researchers are, in the assessment of their materials, continually on the lookout for differences or deviations from the norm. If certain activities deviate from the pattern, this is evidence that there is indeed a pattern. Thus deliberately searching for cases that either confirm or disconfirm initially formulated themes serve to increase the credibility of research conclusions.

Similarly, Wimmer and Dominick (2006:117) say:

As each new unit is examined, it is compared to other units previously assigned to that category to see whether its inclusion is appropriate. If some units of analysis do not fit any pre-existing category, new classification may be created. Units that fit into more than one category should be copied and included where relevant.

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews were qualitatively analysed by presenting the data in thematic patterns. Braun and Clarke (2006:79) describe thematic analysis as a qualitative analytic method for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data

to interpret various aspects of research topic”. A theme captures crucial aspects of data in relation to the research questions and represents meanings within data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006:82). According to Du Plooy (2009:89), thematic analysis is the method used to analyse data obtained through qualitative design. Says Du Plooy (2009:89), this analysis revolves around analysing written or verbal responses.

Du Plooy (2009:100) says “the collected data need to be analysed and interpreted in order to formulate findings which have to be related to the context of the specific study”. According to Du Plooy (2009:100), this is an important step in the research process as the findings form the basis of conclusions and recommendations.

During data coding, this researcher started off by transcribing the interviews by retrieving the recordings from his iPhone. He transcribed the interviews verbatim. After this process, he read the entire transcriptions and coded the data. This was followed by the process of assigning themes to the coded data. This researcher assigned themes by creating a list of themes that emerged from the data on a separate page. After the list of themes were created, he then inserted relevant data on relevant themes while assigning names such as who said what on which theme. The themes will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

4.5 Summary

This chapter discussed the research methodology for this study. As this study makes use of a qualitative research design, qualitative research was discussed – including its advantages and disadvantages. By making use of various sources, this researcher described how qualitative research allows researchers to understand the world of research participants and how they give meaning to what they do.

This researcher also discussed how he went about data gathering and sampling. Purposive sampling was used for participant selection to ensure every subgroup of the accessible population was given a chance to be part of the study. Advantages and disadvantages of purposive sampling were also discussed. This researcher moved to clarify how he will overcome the pitfalls associated with purposive sampling.

This researcher gave a detailed discussion of semi-structured interviews employed for this study. The discussion included how this type of interviews allows the researcher to get more out of the interview process as the researcher can ask follow up questions in order to get clarity of

where the researcher is not clear. In addition, this researcher gave the weaknesses and strengths of interviews. Furthermore, this researcher ventilated on strategies he employed to overcome shortcoming associated with semi-structured interviews and interviews in general. Furthermore, this researcher explained how he went about recruiting research participants from respecting participants' time spent on their daily duties to building rapport with them.

The chapter also discussed qualitative data analysis and how it will be employed in this study to present research findings and to ensure credibility of findings. In this section, this researcher detailed how he transcribed the data, coded it according to themes to ensure easy access during the process of presenting the findings.

In the next chapter, the research findings will be presented.

Chapter 5: Presentation of findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings from the semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with 10 journalists and one photographer at the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun*. These interviews enabled this researcher to gather information about the role of tabloid journalism in South Africa. Moreover, the interviews assisted the researcher to understand the world of tabloid journalism within which the journalists function.

This researcher analysed the data by sorting out the data through coding it into themes. All the data that fell into a specific theme was assigned to the theme concerned. In other words, all the relevant data that fell into particular themes was coded and later retrieved during the writing of this chapter.

In this chapter, this researcher firstly explains how he applied the relevant methodology used to gather and analyse the data. Thereafter, this researcher presents the findings according to thematic patterns that emerged out of the analysis of data from the interviews.

5.2 Review of methodology

This study relied on a qualitative research design. As set out in Chapter 4, the qualitative approach allowed this researcher to produce detailed descriptions of tabloid journalism as phenomenon from the vantage point of journalists themselves.

This researcher conducted the semi-structured interviews himself. All the questions posed to participants were thus developed by the researcher. Since this researcher knew what the goal of the study is, he could therefore guide the conversation or probe further if more information was needed to help answer the research questions. This allowed for the proverbial “conversation with a purpose”. In other words, the conversation flowed naturally but the researcher focused on staying on topic.

Drawing on the problem statement, research questions and literature review, a basic structure for the interviews was designed. The following topics formed part of the interviews:

- Introduction of the researcher, explanation of study’s goals and confirmation of informed consent;

- Journalists' professional backgrounds;
- The popularity of tabloids in post-apartheid South Africa;
- The role of journalism in society;
- Public interest and its place in the invasion of privacy;
- The role of South African tabloids in relation to watchdog function of the media; and,
- The role of fact-checking and verifying information from sources.

The interviews took place on Wednesday 16 August 2017 and started at around 10:00. This researcher arrived at Media24's Auckland Park offices in Johannesburg just before 9:30 on the day. The first 30 minutes were spent exchanging pleasantries with editor-in-chief of the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* Reggie Moalusi. The researcher also discussed the purpose and demands of his study. After the introduction of the researcher, Moalusi gave this researcher a tour of the newsroom explaining what a typical day in the newsroom looks like. Prior to this, this researcher and Moalusi had been communicating through direct messages on Twitter and subsequently through emails over a period of four months. This approach helped this researcher in establishing rapport with the editor-in-chief before visiting the newsroom.

The participants were selected through purposive sampling. In this study, the participants were the editor-in-chief of both the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun*, two news editors, one entertainment editor, six journalists and one photographer. All of the interviewees are directly involved in producing and managing content for these two tabloid newspapers.

Each interview was conducted immediately after the participant was recruited. The participants that were busy filing their stories, requested to first finish their duties. Once they were done with their duties, they came to the small boardroom that was allocated to this researcher for the day and the interviews took place.

To comply with the requirements of Stellenbosch University's Research Ethics Committee, each participant was told that they could request to remain anonymous. All the journalists gave permission for their full names to be used in this study and signed the informed consent form (see Addendum B).

The following interviews were conducted:

Amanda Scott, *Daily Sun* freelance journalist

Doreen Molefe, *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* senior entertainment reporter

Everson Luhanga, *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* senior journalist

Happy Mgnuni, *Daily Sun* deputy news editor

Lerato Matsoso, *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* entertainment editor

Lucky Nxumalo, *Sunday Sun* photographer

Mfundu Mkhulisi, *Daily Sun* court and political reporter

Norman Masungwini, *Sunday Sun* news editor

Reggie Moalusi, *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* editor-in-chief

Tebogo Mokwena, *Daily Sun* junior journalist

Theo Nyaba, *Sunday Sun* senior entertainment journalist

The interviews were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document and coded to identify themes. The themes were determined by the purpose of this study and data that came out of the interviews. This was done by analysing each line of the interview transcription and assigning the relevant lines, in conjunction with the detail of the research participant, to the theme concerned. Table 5.1 summarises the themes that emerged during the interviews. These themes will be used as the basis for the discussion of the research findings.

Theme	Explanation
Professional background of journalists	This refers to the background of the journalists including their tertiary education and years of experience as tabloid journalists.
The popularity of tabloids in post-apartheid South Africa	This theme captures journalists' impressions about the perceived success of tabloid journalism in South Africa.
The role of tabloid journalism in South African society	This theme looks at the role of tabloid journalism in a democratic dispensation.
Tabloid journalism and the watchdog role of the media	The extent to which the journalists believe they perform the watchdog role as journalists working for tabloids.
The ethics of celebrity news coverage	This theme explores how journalists view the relationship between public interest, privacy and human dignity – especially as it pertains to celebrity news coverage.
Fact-checking and sourcing	This theme refers to how journalists talk about accuracy, fact-checking and the reliability of sources.
Tabloid journalism's role in catering for alternative audiences	How journalists talk about the representation of marginalised media audiences in their reporting for tabloid newspapers.

Table 5.1 Themes that emerged during analysis of the semi-structured interview data.

5.3 Findings

In this section the findings from the interviews conducted at the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* will be presented according to the themes identified during data analysis. The views of the journalists at both newspapers will be included because the journalists work together in the same newsroom. Furthermore, some of the journalists are required to contribute stories to both newspapers.

5.3.1 Professional background of journalists

Most of the journalists who participated in the study have tertiary journalism qualifications from universities or universities of technology. The majority of them either started their careers in tabloid journalism, or have been working in the field of tabloid journalism for close to a decade. However, a number of the journalists are still quite new to the journalism profession.

The age of the journalists interviewed for this study ranged from early twenties to early forties. The editor-in-chief, entertainment editor, deputy news editor and news editor interviewed were in their late thirties and early forties. There were two journalists in their twenties: Mokwena, a junior journalist, and, Scott, a freelance journalist.

The editor-in-chief, Moalusi, has over 16 years of experience in the field of tabloid journalism. He started out as a business and consumer writer at the *Sunday World* tabloid in 2002. In 2010 he was appointed deputy editor of the *Daily Sun* and became editor-in-chief of the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* in 2014.

Other experienced tabloid journalists include: Molefe, *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* senior entertainment reporter, with 15 years of experience; Matsoso, *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* entertainment editor, with ten years of experience at the two tabloids; and Luhanga, *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* senior journalist, with eight years of experience.

5.3.2 The popularity of tabloids in post-apartheid South Africa

The research participants have a variety of ideas about what makes tabloids popular. Amongst the reasons they provide include the cost of tabloids, the nature and length of stories and these newspapers' coverage of celebrities.

Editor-in-chief Moalusi attributes the success of the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* to the target market for which the two newspapers cater:

Tabloids in South Africa tapped into a market that was largely not catered for by other newspapers. These are people who could read but were not buying newspapers. Another thing is that tabloids cover stories that really entertain target readers and the story covered are about their lives and they can relate to the stories covered. That is how people started recognising and associating with tabloids and said: 'These are the kind of newspapers that represent us'.

For Masungwini, *Sunday Sun* news editor, the newspaper's writing style and the fact that it caters for what is interesting to readers play a role in the popularity of the newspaper:

Our writing style is one of the factors of the success of our newspapers. It is also about the fact that we write about what our readers want to read about. That is why the *Daily Sun* is the biggest daily newspaper and the *Sunday Sun* is the number two Sunday read in terms of sales.

Masungwini adds that the low price of the newspapers compared to their nearest competitors⁵⁵, also plays a role in the success of these tabloids. The *Daily Sun* costs R3.80 and the *Sunday Sun* costs R11.50. Mokwena, *Daily Sun* junior reporter, further attributes the growth of the two tabloids to their geographical reach. He says the fact that the two newspapers are distributed in all the nine provinces of the country means that the tabloids are able to reach people from various walks of life and various ethnic groups.

Mnguni, *Daily Sun* deputy news editor, echoes sentiments similar to those of Masungwini about how the newspaper's content contributes to its success:

Our stories are about people living in squatter camps, the township and the villages. Our stories are always about what our readers can relate to. We are catering for the man in the blue overall. That is the person we are writing for. Early in the morning the person we are writing for is rushing to work and they quickly buy the newspaper on their way to work and read it while in a train, bus or taxi. During lunchtime, they will share the newspaper with their colleagues and discuss some of the stories covered in the newspaper. That is what makes the *Daily Sun* sell.

According to entertainment editor Matsoso, the tabloids' size and the length of stories are important to the readers:

Tabloids are short, sweet and sensational. People like to read fast news; something they can consume quickly. So if you can read a 300 worded article versus a 1500 worded article [in a broadsheet newspaper], it saves time. Not to say people don't

⁵⁵ Daily newspapers *The Star* costs R10.00, *The Citizen* costs R7.00, the *Sowetan* costs R5.30 while Sunday reads the *Sunday World* costs R9.30 and the *Sunday Times* as well as the *City Press* cost R23.80 and R18.65 respectively.

read broadsheets. Sometimes it takes people a week to finish reading a whole Sunday broadsheet. We want to get the newspaper readers to be done reading as quickly as possible.

Matsoso also believes that these newspapers' focus on celebrities adds to their popularity. Molefe, *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* entertainment reporter agrees:

Although we are often criticised for the kind of news that we cover, the very same people that criticise us still come back for more. They are the same people who come back for more because they cannot get enough. So we take all the criticism with a pinch of salt.

Nyaba, *Sunday Sun* entertainment reporter, says celebrity gossip offers ordinary people some sort of escapism from their daily lives as they get to read about famous people:

I think on a Sunday, ordinary people do not want to read about serious and depressing stuff. They want to know who is sleeping with who. They also want to know what is happening on the entertainment scene such as who attended which party as opposed to what is happening with crime and who committed acts of corruption.

Nyaba further explains that although *Sunday Sun* readers enjoy the news the tabloid carries sometimes a handful give negative feedback on social media platforms. He elucidates:

It is actually good that people go out there and buy our newspaper and take their time to read it. So when they express themselves in whatever way they can, we see that as feedback from a portion of our readers because it shows they have read the newspaper. With the feedback that we receive, our readers would sometimes complain that we write about the same celebrities and they want to read about

different celebrities. If they complain that we write about say for instance, Khanyi Mbau [radio and television personality] and Bonang Matheba [radio and television personality], what we look at is really, who is making news. We cannot shy away from writing about what is current. But at the same time, scandalous stories about Bonang Matheba and Khanyi Mbau sell very well because they are very popular.

5.3.3 The role of tabloid journalism in South African society

Journalists and editors from both the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* were unanimous in their belief that tabloid journalism plays an important role in society. According to the study participants, tabloids are especially helpful in bridging the gap between celebrities and the reading public and in giving ordinary people from less affluent areas the opportunity to have their stories told in order to resolve service delivery issues. According to Moalusi, the role of the media in general is to be one of the cornerstones of a constitutional democracy:

As a tabloid, our role is to educate our readers, empower them and to enlighten them. Our readers are at the centre of what we do. All the stories that we publish, we publish to serve them.

Similarly, Mokwena says tabloid journalism contributes to empowering readers with information that communities can use to mobilise themselves and demand accountability from political leaders:

When people read in the newspapers how bad things are in government, such as cronyism and corruption, they can demand that a certain political leader be removed or certain services be delivered to them. That is what journalism can do. It informs people, thus enabling them to be proactive citizens who care about how their country is led.

Senior journalist Luhanga says “the big role of tabloid journalism is to change people’s lives and help the helpless”. He says his role is to hold public servants to account on issues affecting ordinary people:

As a reporter, you need to see the problems of the person you are interviewing for what they are and if by telling their story you can assist them, then that is what you need to do. If someone’s house is broken into 20 times in a year and the police are not doing anything about it, I need to contact the police before I write the story and ask them to explain why they are not helping. If the local police are not cooperating at all, then I call the provincial office, if needs be, [I contact] up to the level of the national office to ensure police management are in touch with real issues on the ground facing our readers.

Luhanga says due to service delivery backlogs throughout the country, people in informal settlements, townships and villages have grown increasingly impatient with the government. According to Luhanga, this has led to violent service delivery protests adding that “people use violence service delivery protests to voice their frustration over lack of government services provision”. He adds that when tabloids report about service delivery issues it, is “about bringing the reality” of ordinary people to the attention of government leaders:

If people voted a government into power hoping that the government will change their lives but they feel the government has forgotten about them because they stay in a squatter camp in Alexandra or in Khayelitsha, then we need to think again. What we do with our stories is that we document the plight of the people and we say to the politicians, this is what your electorate is complaining about.

Moalusi confirms that service delivery protest stories are important to the *Daily Sun* readers as such service delivery protests happen where “our readers live and the protests affect their lives in many ways”. He adds that the newspaper “is by far the leading newspaper in the country that covers service delivery protests”. In addition, Moalusi says:

Our readers want to see things working well in their communities. They pay their rates and taxes. Therefore, they do not understand why they do not get services that are due to them because they pay for such services. Service delivery protests get violent and others get affected by the violence. Therefore, we cannot shy away from reporting about them because politicians need to see how unhappy the people who voted them into power are.

Similarly, Scott, freelance journalist for the *Daily Sun*, says writing about service delivery protests is important because the *Daily Sun* readers see such news as part of their empowerment when they “need to participate in democratic processes”. According to Scott such news “helps them to make better decisions about their lives and who they would like to elect in government”.

Luhanga believes tabloids also show affluent communities that they are not alone in the country: “Just across the road from Sandton, there is Alexandra. Think of them before you throw away food or spend money recklessly.”

5.3.4 Tabloid journalism and the watchdog role of the media

All of the journalists and editors who participated in this study believe that, as tabloid journalists, they perform the watchdog role for the greater benefit of society in general. They also believe that tabloid journalists have a responsibility to improve the lives of their readers.

Mnguni says when ordinary people see something is wrong somewhere, “they stop, look and move on”. According to Mnguni, “As journalists, we stop, look and ask what is happening and why things are happening the way they are happening. That is our role”. According to Mnguni, the *Daily Sun* readers want to know “what is happening in the political arena and it is our responsibility to inform them what is happening”. He says as the top three political parties in the country, the African National Congress⁶ (ANC), the Democratic Alliance⁷ (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters⁸ (EFF), attract interest and attention from readers and therefore the tabloids

⁶ The ANC received an overall of 62.15% in the 2014 national elections (Electoral Commission of South Africa, n.d.)

⁷ The DA received an overall of 22.3% in the 2014 national elections (Electoral Commission of South Africa, n.d.)

⁸ The EFF received an overall of 6.35% in the 2014 national elections (Electoral Commission of South Africa, n.d.)

have to report on what these political parties are up to. He says how they package the political stories is important:

We do not want to bore our readers with political jargon. We have our own way that we write to ensure our readers can relate to the political stories we write.

Moalusi explains that the *Daily Sun* reader is a man who has a family, lives in the township and cares about his family. He elucidates that the political functioning and the future of the country concern this reader:

He would like to see things working out in his community. He wants to see the streetlights working, he wants to have a tarred road and wants the potholes fixed. He wants to see teachers at school, in class teaching his children for eight hours a day. He wants to see the public transport system working in good order. He wants to see the leaders of his country being accountable. That is the *Daily Sun* reader. When the government system fails to deliver, he relies on our newspaper to expose those who steal money meant to build houses for the poor so that senior political leaders can do something about his situation.

Nyaba believes that “to an extent” he plays the watchdog role for his “target readers”. Mkhulisi says as a journalist, he definitely feels he is playing the watchdog role “because we go out there and expose any form of wrongdoing”. He refers to reporting on Nkandlagate⁹ saying:

If it was not of the media, the millions of rand spent on Nklanda, some of the money would never have been recovered and no one would not have known how much money was spent there. When the *Mail and Guardian* broke the story, our

⁹ Nkandlagate refers to the term used by the media in reference to the then Public Protector Adv Thuli Madonsela’s “Secure in Comfort” report which investigated allegations of impropriety and unethical conduct relating to the installation and implementation of security and related measures at the private residence of the former President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, at Nkandla in the KwaZulu-Natal Province (Madonsela, 2014). The Public Protector found that the former President [then sitting state President] unduly benefited from the so called security upgrades and ordered that he pay back some of the millions back into the state coffers. (Madonsela, 2014)

politicians were denying every alleged wrongdoing. But the media exposed how almost R250 million was spent on the President's private residence. We continued reporting about it in our various newspapers as the media to let people know what was happening.

5.3.5 The ethics of celebrity news coverage

While bridging the gap between communities and their political leaders is important, Matsoso says it is equally important for tabloids to show ordinary people how the challenges of their lives compare to the lives of celebrities. She believes that stories about celebrities help make ordinary people feel these celebrities face similar life challenges as they do:

If a celebrity makes a mistake an ordinary people can identify with, whether it is cheating on their partner or be caught shoplifting, when we report about it, people come to the realisation that celebrities are also human beings just like them and they face similar life challenges as they do. The only difference is that celebrities are in the public eye.

Most of the participants use references to news coverage on celebrities to clarify and explain their views – especially around the ethics of tabloid journalism.

Masungwini says before talking about celebrities, it is important to note that “when tabloids arrived in South Africa, there was a bit of confusion as to who and what it is a celebrity”. He defines the word celebrity in the following manner:

For our purpose, we use the word celebrity loosely to include musicians, soccer players and actors. For our purpose, a celebrity is someone who is well-known. A celebrity in our sense is different from how they are being referred to in the global north. For us, anyone who appears on television regularly is a celebrity. Any person who is on radio consistently, we see that person as a celebrity.

Public figures such as politicians, soccer players and celebrities, for instance, “have little to no privacy” when it comes to issues involving their lives and their careers, say Matsoso, Molefe, Nyaba and Masungwini. It could therefore be argued that these journalists believe invading the privacy of such high profile individuals could be viewed as in the public interest.

Not all the journalists, however, seem to understand what public interest means and how it differs from what is of interest to the public. News coverage that is in the public interest could be described as aimed at exposing wrongdoing for greater public benefit and empowering the public with information to improve their lives. On the other hand, news that is of interest to the public is arguably more concerned with entertainment value.

It is worth noting that some journalists feel that it is self-evident what public interest is and that what is *of* interest to the public also does not need to be explained. However, the various editors, Moalusi, Masungwini and Mnguni, and journalists such as Mokwena and Mkhulisi, did seem able to define what public interest means. Mnguni says:

Journalism is all about exposing wrongdoing. If a political figure is giving government jobs to his or her family members, then we need to expose such. That is public interest. Public interest is about exposing nepotism and corruption amongst other things.

Mkhulisi says public interest refers to “the kind of information that the public has a right to know because it is in their interest to know what is happening”. Mokwena adds that public interest has to do with “any aspect, norm or trend that affects the general public in various aspects of their lives”. According to Mokwena, “this can be events that are happening in the public sector or private sector. If it falls within the framework of where the public is affected, it is a matter of public interest”.

Masungwini uses a specific example to define public interest:

What is *of* interest to the public has no value to the public and the public will not gain anything out of knowing that. But the case of Mduduzi Manana¹⁰ beating up

¹⁰ Former Deputy Minister of Higher Education of the Republic of South Africa, former Member of Parliament and also a current member of the African National Congress’ (ANC) National Executive Committee. (South African

a woman at a night club and abusing his helper, is *in* the public interest because of his position and what the law says.

Matsoso says well-known people using the media to advance their careers “need to know once you open the door for the media into your life, your privacy is over”. She argues that celebrities cannot want the media to write about them only when things are going well for them: “Why should it be exclusive to certain things you want the public to know and other things about your life you do not want the public to know?” Mnguni echoes Matsoso’s sentiments adding that readers want to know about both the professional *and* personal lives of celebrities. Once celebrities have opened the door for the media into their lives, there is no closing it, he says.

Moalusi believes, however, that every individual deserves privacy, including celebrities. “Journalists need to know how far they can go and where they need to draw the line. We need to know what is acceptable and what is not acceptable,” he says.

Molefe says she sometimes writes negative stories about celebrities even if they do not want their reputation damaged. For her, the important thing is “not to jeopardise my credibility and ethics as a journalist”. “As a journalist, I cannot write lies,” Molefe adds.

The issue of credibility and ethical conduct thus appear to be important to all the journalists and editors – even when reporting on celebrities. Credibility and ethical conduct is important to us because the two are some of the “cornerstones of journalism,” say Matsoso, Masungwini and Nyaba.

Molefe sees herself as a “human being first and a journalist second”. She says when it comes to issues affecting the public and normal functioning of society, it is clear where the line [between what is wrong and right] should be drawn. However, she says when it comes to writing about lives of celebrities, “there are no clear lines”. Nevertheless, says Molefe, when she writes about celebrities, there are instances where “upholding human dignity” becomes her guiding principle. She cites the following example to support her point:

A couple of years ago, [award winning jazz and gospel musician] Judith Sephuma lost her three months old baby. Our sources about the story were impeccable. We

Government, n.d.). Manana was accused of assaulting three women at a nightclub in Johannesburg and later pleaded guilty in court (Gous, 2018.) Manana was also accused of assaulting his domestic helper, (Gous, 2018).

tried to write the story but we could not run with it because she deserved the right to mourn in private. However, later on when she dealt with the pain, she did volunteer to talk to us about the experience of losing her child. Because she volunteered the information, we could write about it only then. Imagine the harm it would have caused her by us contacting her asking for comment while she was grieving and we say: ‘Judith, I am so and so from the *Sunday Sun*. We hear that you just lost your baby two hours ago...’ We got the story immediately after her baby died. This is where we had to show care about the people we write about.

Molefe is clear that issues of personal suffering is a “no go area”. She continues:

There was a time we received information that a certain celebrity was raped. We could not divulge that information because the celebrity did not consent to making such information about their personal pain public knowledge. There are certain things that you know as a human being that you cannot cross that particular line.

Nyaba says although his first responsibility is towards his readers and not celebrities, he would not write a story that he came across due to his close proximity to certain celebrities:

Personally I do not befriend celebrities but it is good to be acquainted to them because it becomes easier to get favours such as getting contact numbers of another celebrity they work with. So if I am at a house of a celebrity I am acquainted to, and I witness a fight between him and his partner, I will not write about that incident. But if there is police involved and a case has been opened, then I can write the story because once the matter reaches the police, chances are, another journalist will write about it.

Similarly, Matsoso says if there is a scandalous story about a celebrity she is acquainted with, she tries to find the best way of navigating around issues of respect for their dignity. She admits it is not always easy to find the best way of handling such a story:

I struggle a lot with that whereby you know a celebrity personally and you know what they are going through and you cannot report on those instances, because you do not want to compromise yourself, or whatever the relationship it is that you have with them. But the fact remains that they are a public figure. One way or the other, the news about them will come out. I try to balance it with my relationships – if I have a certain relationship with a celebrity, I say to them: ‘Listen, you know you can trust me, I will try to tone down whatever it is I write because scandalous celebrity news is my business.’ Sometimes I would remove myself from the story and hand the story over to my colleagues to pursue it.

News editor of the *Sunday Sun* Masungwini says although this tabloid is empathetic towards experiences of celebrities, it sometimes “becomes difficult to ignore salacious news involving celebrities”. He adds: “We sometimes break the rules.” When asked why, he elaborates that some of the things they write about celebrities are not necessarily in the public interest. Nonetheless, says Masungwini, they do write about it and “take a risk”. He says sometimes “we get away with it and sometimes we don’t as our news subjects take us to court or to the press ombudsman”.

5.3.6 Fact-checking and sourcing

Journalists who participated in this study said it was imperative to verify information they receive from sources. For a story to be deemed credible and accurate, “at least three sources needed to confirm that a particular incident, indeed, did take place,” says Matsoso. She adds that she verifies information by contacting “other sources close to the situation”. According to Matsoso, she offers them the opportunity “to remain anonymous to protect their relationship with the news subject”. Moreover, Matsoso says a “one-source based story” does not get published. “We need more than two sources. That is how we verify our news,” she says.

Nyaba says building rapport with celebrities is of great significance because for most of the stories he writes, his sources are celebrities. Therefore, he always contacts them to verify stories he is investigating, he says. Nxumalo says in most instances, evidence in the form of a genuine picture is crucial because “the picture becomes the story. You cannot deny photographic evidence”.

Matsoso agrees that photographic evidence and other forms of evidence are of great value:

The evidence creates the story and becomes the story. When you have evidence and you call the news subject for a comment and they say they have no comment, the evidence is there. We will write in the story that the subject refused to comment and allow the evidence to tell the story so the readers can make up their own minds. Even when the news subject approaches us after we have published the story and say they are suing us, we know we have covered ourselves. The evidence is important in driving the story. You cannot argue with facts.

In the same vein, Molefe says verification of news is a none-negotiable process in the news gathering process. She adds:

You need to check and cross check the story. Once the stories is published in the newspaper, there is no correcting the information. Therefore, if I am not sure of the information I have at my disposal, I would rather wait until I have satisfied myself that the story is solid.

5.3.7 Tabloid journalism’s role in catering for alternative audiences

All of the participants insist their role is to serve their readers by documenting their struggles, and so ensure those entrusted with political power fulfil their responsibilities. In other words: the journalists consider serving and informing their readers as their social responsibility.

Moalusi says although broadsheet newspapers are “coming to the fore in documenting stories of ordinary people, they are still focused mostly on aspects like issues of policy”. He adds that “the man in the blue overall”, who has long been neglected by the mainstream media

conversations and debates, “now has a platform” in the form of the *Daily Sun* to speak out and voice his concerns. “Ordinary people are at the centre of what the *Daily Sun* delivers and this has been the case for the past 17 years. It will stay like that for a long time to come,” he says.

When asked why controversial and contested stories involving tokoloshes are reported on, Mokwena says South Africans come from different belief systems and no belief system is greater than the other. He adds that the stories about tokoloshes, snakes and gorillas are a reality to those who go through that experience. He also says many of the *Daily Sun* readers have seen tokoloshes and want such stories told.

Mokwena continues that the *Daily Sun*’s Sun Power¹¹ initiative proves that the tabloid has succeeded in catering for alternative audiences. As such the tabloid also fulfils its social responsibility by reflecting the needs of ordinary people. Mokwena cites an example of a story from the *Daily Sun* in February 2017. The tabloid reported on a young boy called Sizwe from Ekurhuleni who needed prosthetic legs but his parents could not afford them. A reader from Tshwane who works at a prosthetic manufacturing company showed the story to his employers and asked them to assist. His employers then volunteered to make prosthetics for Sizwe. Says Mokwena:

That is what we call Sun Power. These are not the kind of stories you would normally read about in a broadsheet newspaper, especially if the news subject is not a part of the middle class.

Moalusi adds that in fulfilling the *Daily Sun*’s social responsibility, the stories in the newspaper are focused on uplifting communities. He says some of their readers need more than what government institutions are able to deliver. A case in point is when readers need reasonable repairs of their home appliances such as fridges, geyser and drainage systems, he says. Moalusi explains that Mr Fix It (as described in section 2.3.1) fits in perfectly well in this regard:

¹¹ Sun Power refers to the feedback the newspaper receives from various readers with offers to help particular news subjects with certain difficulties they are facing (Mokwena, 2017). Such news subjects would normally not afford to pay the money required for them in order to enjoy quality of life in a way that someone from a middle class background would (Mokwena, 2017).

Mr Fix It has been a success considering how fixing a home can be a costly exercise. This initiative is widely appreciated by readers who have seen its impact and the fact that it is not merely meant for publicity purposes – the person whose house gets fixed does not get their pictures or the entire house published. The initiative is here to stay and continues to attract well-meaning sponsors who are ready to help out.

In the context of delivering impactful stories, Luhanga explains that he has written many stories about people in the township of Alexandra who have had to live with a burst sewerage pipe in their backyard for weeks. “When we wrote about it, the municipality quickly corrected the situation,” he says. As a journalist, he felt the need to update his readers about how the local municipality corrected the situation after the *Daily Sun* reported on it. “Immediately after the follow-up story, I received a call from a reader in Khayelitsha informing me that they too have a similar problem and the municipality has done nothing about it for weeks,” he says, adding:

When our readers contact us, you can see that we are their only remaining hope and they believe in the power of the *Daily Sun* to change things for them. We cannot afford to fail them.

Masungwini says that the stories the *Daily Sun* publishes, whether positive or negative, have a bigger purpose serving ordinary people. He does acknowledge that a ward councillor may not like how the newspaper reports about the failure of local government to deliver services to the poor. In spite of that, he says, such stories serve marginalised people well. Mokwena adds:

By telling such stories, we are helping the working class to receive services due to them, and ensure even the poorest of the poor’s voices are heard. In the same vein, we also afford government officials a chance to respond and to remedy the situation.

5.4 Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the semi-structured interviews according to themes that emerged during the analysis of data. The themes were informed by this study's literature review and theoretical framework.

Seven themes were identified from the interviews conducted. Firstly, the journalists and editors' academic and journalistic background were discussed. Most of the journalists have tertiary journalism qualifications and many have years of experience in tabloid journalism.

The second theme captured the journalists' beliefs about what makes their newspapers popular with the South African newspaper reading public. This researcher discovered that the journalists believe the geographic reach of the newspaper, language use, and brevity of stories as well as coverage of celebrities are some of the factors that contribute to the popularity of tabloids.

In terms of the role of tabloid journalism in South African society specifically, it became apparent that one of the key issues centres on service delivery issues that affect ordinary people from less affluent communities.

When asked about the watchdog function of the media, all the research participants believe tabloids perform this function. According to the participants, they perform this function by documenting stories of ordinary people and showcasing how ordinary people are being let down by those entrusted with political power.

Another prominent theme that emerged during the analysis, was the coverage of celebrities by tabloids and how the journalists approach such coverage from an ethical standpoint. Issues around public interest, privacy and human dignity were raised.

The importance of fact-checking and reliable sources was also emphasised. Journalists were unanimous in their view that they need more than two sources to confirm an incident. The participants also said that, as far as possible, they need actual evidence for the information they are getting from their sources.

Lastly, the participants talked about their responsibility to serve "the man in the blue overall". As such they provide news for an audience that is often ignored by other media publications. Initiatives such as Sun Power and Mr Fix It are some of the initiatives that the *Daily Sun* uses to cater for alternative audiences.

The next chapter concludes the study and answers the general and specific research questions.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter firstly provides a summary of this study. The findings of this research are then used to answer the three specific research questions (as stated in Chapter 1, section 1.4). The conclusions reached will be used to answer the general research question: How do journalists at the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* view and describe their social responsibility towards society?

The chapter also highlights the contribution the study makes and suggests avenues for further research.

6.2 Chapter summaries

6.2.1 Chapter 1: Introduction

In the introduction, the rationale for this study was explained as being informed by the popularity of these two newspapers amongst newspaper audiences. Attention was thus paid to how the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* tabloids perform in the newspaper market. Criticism of tabloid journalism in South Africa was discussed. The criticism of tabloids focused on the perceived lack of ethical considerations by tabloids. Furthermore, a cursory overview of media ethics indicated that ethical journalists should be concerned with how their reporting affects the people they report about.

The aim of the study was set out as exploring how tabloid journalists view and describe their responsibility towards society.

This chapter also introduced the theoretical framework and methodology for this study. Furthermore, the chapter set out the structure for this thesis.

6.2.2 Chapter 2: Literature review

The purpose of doing the literature review was to assist this researcher with familiarising himself with studies that have already been conducted in the field of tabloid journalism.

Gaps in existing research on tabloid journalism was identified to show that this study will make a contribution to the academic field. The review of literature showed that criticism of tabloid journalism starts with the word tabloid itself as it is often used in a pejorative sense. This researcher reflected on how tabloids have been criticised for avoiding reporting about serious

issues in society such as HIV/AIDS. However, to their credit, tabloids have done more for journalism by bringing new publics into the newspaper reading world by catering for marginalised audiences.

The literature review further revealed that tabloid journalists see themselves as performing their journalistic functions in the same way as journalists at the mainstream newspapers. However, the tabloid journalists believed they fulfil a different role in society than serious news media but they still perform similar journalistic functions. The tabloid journalists said they do this by speaking truth to power on behalf of people in poor communities. Such tabloid journalists said they do see themselves as watchdogs of society. This showed that tabloid journalists believed they have the same role as journalists in the serious news media.

This chapter also discussed some media ethical issues related to tabloid journalism. Research showed that all journalists, including tabloid journalists, use the press code as their conscience. They self-regulate according to these guidelines voluntarily. This researcher argued that tabloid journalists should also be judged by the same ethical standards as the mainstream media since these tabloid publications, specifically the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun*, also subscribe to the press code. Ethical guidelines around truth-telling, accuracy and respect for human dignity, including the right to privacy, were described as important to tabloid journalists.

6.2.3 Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

In Chapter 3, the normative media theory of social responsibility and the theoretical concept of an alternative public sphere were introduced. These theoretical concepts were introduced in order to help frame and contextualise the findings of this study.

According to social responsibility theory, the media fulfil their duties by serving society. The theory posits that to serve society, the media need to empower media audiences with information that will help them to make decisions about their lives and to hold leaders to account. As such, this theory advocates for empowering audiences and for the media to play a role in the strengthening of democracy and democratic processes.

This chapter further discussed Jürgen Habermas' concept of the bourgeois public sphere which refers to an imaginary public space where people come together to freely discuss socio-political issues. This concept was later expanded to include a cultural public sphere and an alternative public sphere. While the cultural public sphere is concerned with contemporary culture,

the alternative public sphere is understood to be concerned with identities that do not fall within Habermas' broader public sphere theory. In other words, the alternative public sphere takes cognisance of the fact that there can be many public spheres depending, for instance, on one's social class.

By combining these two theoretical concepts this researcher was able to describe how tabloid journalists view their responsibility towards society – specifically in catering for an alternative public sphere.

6.2.4 Chapter 4: Research methodology

This study relied on a qualitative research design. By employing a qualitative research method, specifically semi-structured interviews, this researcher gathered data at the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* to understand what journalists view as their social responsibility towards society. Questions were also asked about the type of audiences these journalists believe they cater for.

This researcher explained that he spoke to ten journalists and one photographer working at these two newspapers. He further explained that he used thematic analysis to organise the findings according to themes that emerged from the interview data.

6.2.5 Chapter 5: Presentation of findings

This chapter presented the findings of this study in a thematic pattern. A total of seven themes were identified from the interviews conducted with the research participants.

The themes were identified by analysing each sentence of the interview data.

The themes identified were:

- Professional background of journalists
- The popularity of tabloids in post-apartheid South Africa
- The role of tabloid journalism in South African society
- Tabloid journalism and the watchdog role of the media
- The ethics of celebrity news coverage
- Fact-checking and sourcing
- Tabloids journalism's role in catering for alternative audiences

The findings presented in Chapter 5 will now be used to answer the general and specific research questions.

6.3 Response to specific research questions

In this section, the specific research questions are answered based on the findings from Chapter 5.

The first specific research question answered by this study was:

What role do journalists at the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* believe tabloids fulfil in society?

The journalists believed tabloid journalists perform the watchdog function of the media by serving people who have been ignored by the mainstream media. According to the study participants, when the *Daily Sun* reader has been let down by government systems, their last resort is to turn to the tabloid to tell his/her story so that senior leaders can remedy the situation.

The participants said that by detailing ordinary people's daily hardships, they, as journalists, can help to improve the quality of their readers' lives. This comes as a result of government officials taking action to correct the situation on the ground as reported in the tabloids.

The journalists further said they also help to inform ordinary people about corruption happening not only in the public sector but also in the private sector. The journalists view writing about corruption as a form of playing the watchdog role of the media. This, according to the journalists, is a typical example of journalists reporting news that is in the public interest as it impacts on the normal functioning of society.

In terms of the role that the journalists at the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* believe they fulfil in society, the journalists believe their role is one of the cornerstones of a constitutional democracy. As a matter of fact, the journalists believed they empower communities with information that matters to them to help them become informed citizens who can use the information to inform their electoral decisions. In addition, the journalists believed their role in society is to change people's lives, one story at a time. Whether they do this by exposing government's failure to deliver services to communities or to mobilise their readers to assist each other where possible, the journalists believed they are there to serve society.

What do journalists at the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* view as socially responsible reporting?

All the editors and journalists who took part in this study see socially responsible journalism as an important aspect of their work. Accordingly, being socially responsible gives meaning to the journalists' work in terms of *how* they do their reporting and *why* they do it.

The journalists generally used their coverage of celebrity news as examples of how they perform socially responsible journalism. The participants indicated that they act responsibly and ethically by respecting the privacy of those who are in the public eye.

Some of the journalists said celebrities do deserve privacy. In reporting about the lives of celebrities, the journalists believed they minimise harm by respecting the privacy of those who are mourning. However, not all of them agreed. Those who did not agree believed celebrities using the media to advance their careers lose their right to privacy when they invite the media into their lives. When it comes to scandalous news about celebrities, some of the journalists believed they sometimes invade the privacy of celebrities even though doing so might not be in the public interest. However, since celebrities use the media to advance their careers by actively seeking positive publicity, the journalists said when things do not go well for such celebrities, it was their duty as journalists to inform their readers about such news.

The journalists were unequivocal in contending they put their own humanity, and that of the people they report on, above getting the story. One journalist explained, for instance, that she would not report on how a celebrity had lost her child without the permission of that particular celebrity. This shows that where journalists feel it is necessary to minimise harm, they would rather not write a story altogether.

Furthermore, journalists said they view the role of fact-checking and verifying information from their sources as part of socially responsible journalism. In fact, for these journalists, fact-checking and the verification of information is essential to the very practice of journalism itself.

Maintaining their credibility, not only amongst their peers but also to their readers, is also a strong motivating factor for the journalists to insist they need three sources or more for the stories that they write. Wherever possible, journalists emphasised that they need to publish the original evidence of whatever it is that they are writing about to ensure readers have the option to make up their own minds about a story. Thus, being furnished with evidence from sources appeared to be a desirable part of news gathering processes in order to boost the journalists' credibility.

The third specific research question answered by this study was:

What do journalists at the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* believe is their role in catering for marginalised voices?

Tabloids ensure that their target readers are well informed about issues that affect people of the same social class as them. This information assists them when they need to participate in democratic processes such as deciding who to vote for during elections. Similarly, the *Daily Sun*'s and the *Sunday Sun*'s continuation of detailing the trivia of ordinary people results in the strengthening of democracy as the people decide on their own that they are going to embark on protest action demanding political accountability, and services due to them. As a matter of fact, the tabloids reporting about such protest action often leads to an expedited political will to address the needs of the people.

Equally important for these journalists is the fact that they, in instances where government cannot assist, help the *Daily Sun* readers to mobilise in order to assist a reader who might not be enjoying proper quality of life. A journalist listed the example of a reader who helped a young boy acquire prosthetic legs, thanks to the *Daily Sun* detailing the boy's plight in the newspaper. Similarly, the newspaper also has a feature called Mr Fix It, aimed at assisting the *Daily Sun* readers with reasonable repairs in their homes free of charge.

Without reservation, the journalists view their role as specifically catering for "the man in the blue overall". "The man in the blue overall" refers to the way a working class person, or an unskilled labourer often dresses (see photos in Addendum E) when performing their daily duties at work. The journalists do so by giving a space in the newspaper to ordinary people to voice their concerns about socio-political issues affecting them. These socio-political issues are issues that are relevant and important to "the man in the blue overall". "The man in the blue overall" is usually let down by government systems and sees the *Daily Sun* as his last resort in a bid to solve his problems. Having ventilated the public sphere theory and the alternative public sphere in great detail in Chapter 3, this researcher can now conclude that "the man in the blue overall" is a term that the *Daily Sun* uses to refer to an alternative public sphere. As argued above, the "man" here includes female readers.

6.4 General conclusion of study

In order to draw a final conclusion for the study, one general research question was formulated:

How do journalists at the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* view and describe their social responsibility towards society?

As this researcher has shown, tabloid journalists do take their roles seriously and this is an important aspect that shone throughout the presentation of findings. This study shows that the tabloids in this study have a bigger role to play in society especially in the deepening of democracy as they empower and educate the majority of South Africans with knowledge about socio-political issues affecting majority of the population. The empowerment of these tabloids' audiences is congruent with the media social responsibility theory which states that the media need to serve society by empowering media audiences with information.

The findings have shown that the journalists believe their role is firstly to serve their readers. The *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* reader, named "the man in the blue overall" by the newspapers and their journalists, need a space to talk about his issues and to be heard. These tabloid newspapers therefore exist to serve this reader. Thus, the journalists at these tabloids view and describe their social responsibility towards society as catering for an alternative public sphere by ensuring ordinary people have a platform to voice their concerns so they can be heard and answered.

The social responsibility of tabloid journalism in South Africa was therefore explained by the journalists as detailing the daily trivia of ordinary people to ensure their voices are heard. This researcher would argue that providing a voice for the so-called ordinary man, can be seen as the driving force behind the existence of the tabloids.

Over and above detailing the everyday trivia of "the man in blue overall", the journalists also view their role as catering for marginalised voices in society. In other words, that is to say they view their role as catering for an alternative public sphere. These journalists believe they empower and educate their readers to ensure these tabloid readers become well informed and active citizens. If the readers are well informed about their country, they can become active citizens who hold the political elite to account. The political elite represent ordinary people who elected these political figures to positions of power.

Furthermore, the social responsibility of tabloid journalism is viewed by the journalists as providing their readers with news about the people they watch on TV and whose voices they hear

on the radio on a regular basis. According to the journalists, such coverage shows ordinary people that celebrities are also human as they face similar life challenges as ordinary people.

The general conclusion of this study is therefore that journalists at the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* are very aware of their responsibility towards society. They understand that tabloid journalism has a specific role to play in the media landscape – partly because these newspapers cater for marginalised audiences whose voices are rarely heard in the mainstream media. Therefore, the imaginary public space referred to by Habermas, can, in this study, be seen as the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Sun* because that is where ordinary people's talk about their hardships. This researcher would therefore argue that, despite the criticism that is regularly levelled against tabloid journalists, they play a crucial role in serving the society and audiences they report for.

6.5 Contribution of the study

The main contribution of this study is that it adds insights to the academic body of knowledge on tabloid journalism in South Africa. Furthermore, the study also adds value to the way tabloid journalists see their role by getting them to reflect on their duties and editorial decisions that they make every day in the process of gathering news.

6.6 Limitations of the study

The main limitation of this study is that it only focused on two tabloids in South Africa. Consequently, the findings of this study cannot be used to generalise how journalists at *all* the tabloids in the country view and describe their social responsibility. Moreover, some of the journalists' time was limited, which made some of the interviews limited in terms of scope and depth. This might have led to the journalists not being able to elaborate about their editorial decisions.

In spite of this study's limitations, this researcher believes this research is valuable as it has come up with new insights on at least two of South Africa's tabloid publications. Furthermore, the study can be used as a reference point by other researchers who would like to delve deeper into understanding tabloid journalism in South Africa.

6.7 Directions for further research

Tabloid journalism in South Africa has a big following compared to the so-called serious news media. However, the study has shown that what tabloid journalists write is not necessarily always

in the public interest and the journalists themselves know this. Exploring the tabloidisation of news, that is to say transforming news into lurid and sensationalist news as well as the reporting of juicy titbits about trivial celebrity gossip, provides some area for future research. The future research can focus on the application of media ethics, or lack thereof, in the tabloidisation of news.

Furthermore, a study similar to this one, can be conducted but it can focus on vernacular tabloids such as *Isolezwe*, *Ilanga* and *UmAfrica*. The study can help in providing insights of the success and or popularity of these isiZulu newspapers while other newspaper have closed down in the recent past. Similarly, a follow up study can be conducted which explores how celebrities are covered in the tabloids and also in the mainstream newspapers.

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Personal interviews

Masungwini, N. 2017b. Personal interview. 16 August 2017 at Auckland Park.

Luhanga, E. 2017b. Personal interview. 16 August 2017 at Auckland Park.

Matsoso, L. 2017. Personal interview. 16 August 2017 at Auckland Park.

Mkhulisi, M. 2017. Personal interview. 16 August 2017 at Auckland Park.

Mnguni, H. 2017. Personal interview. 16 August 2017 at Auckland Park.

Moalusi, R. 2017. Personal interview. 16 August 2017 at Auckland Park.

Mokwena, T. 2017. Personal interview. 16 August 2017 at Auckland Park.

Molefe, D. 2017. Personal interview. 16 August 2017 at Auckland Park.

Nxumalo, L. 2017. Personal interview. 16 August 2017 at Auckland Park.

Nyaba, T. 2017b. Personal interview. 16 August 2017 at Auckland Park.

Scott, A. 2017. Personal interview. 16 August 2017 at Auckland Park.

Addenda

Addendum A: Demographic breakdown of *Daily Sun* readership

The following figures, as provided to this researcher by De Araujo (2018), show demographic breakdown of the *Daily Sun* readership. Figure 1 provides provincial readership figures of the newspapers across all nine provinces of South Africa. Figure 2 shows income groups of the readership makeup of the daily. While figure 3 shows demographics in terms of gender and race, figure 4 shows age groups and language makeup of the tabloid. Finally, figure 5 shows education levels of the newspaper's readers while figure 6 shows employment status of the readership.

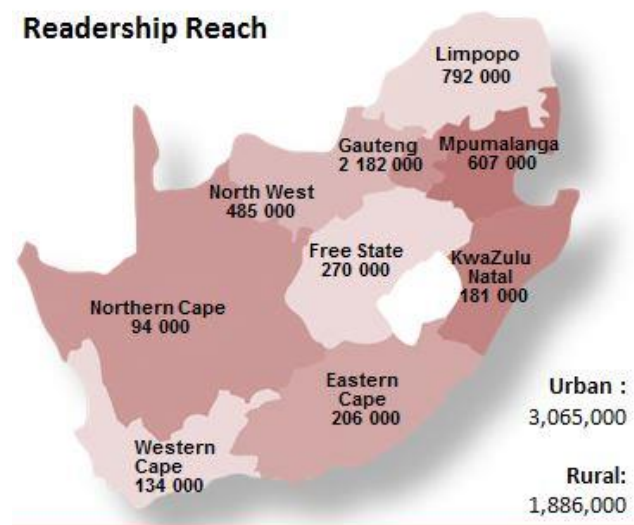


Figure 1: Readership reach per province

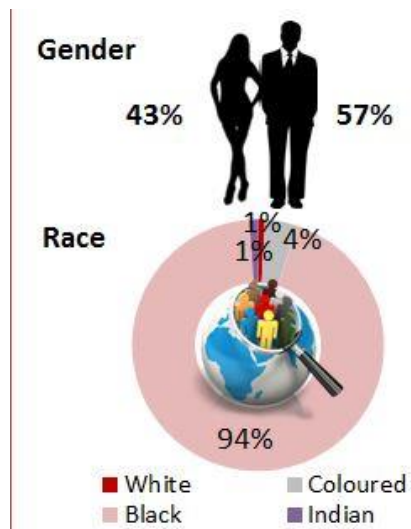


Figure 2: Gender and race

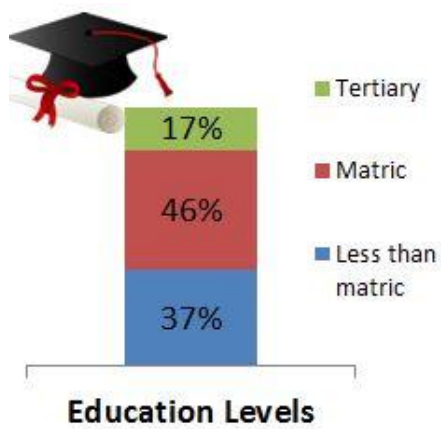


Figure 3: Educational qualifications

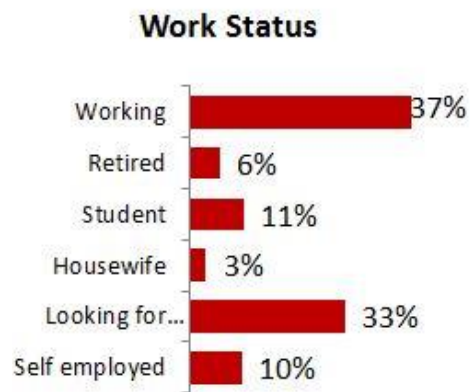


Figure 4: Employment status

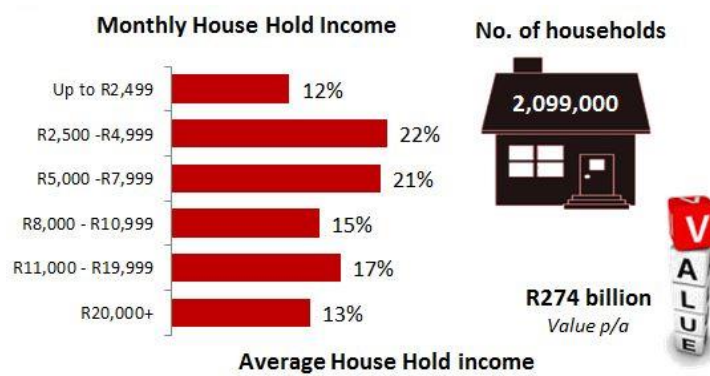


Figure 5: Households and income levels

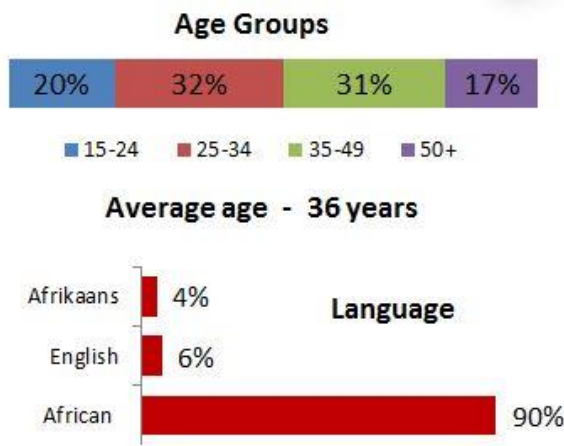


Figure 6: Readership by age groups and language groups

Addendum B: Institutional permission for research

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Wed 2018/08/15 05:15 PM

Dimakatso Mokwena <mokwenad@gmail.com>

Fwd: Re: Request to conduct academic research at the Sunday Sun

To: Mokwena DD - Colonel

Click here to download pictures. To help protect your privacy, Outlook prevented automatic download of some pictures in this message.

From: Dimakatso Mokwena [mailto:mokwenad@gmail.com]
Sent: Monday, April 24, 2017 2:54 PM
To: Reggy Moahusi
Subject: Request to conduct academic research at the Sunday Sun

Dear Mr Moahusi

Thank you for responding to my DM on Twitter, greatly appreciated. As such, our Twitter DMs bear reference to this subject matter.

I am Masters (MA) Journalism student at Stellenbosch University. I am this year working on my thesis as part of studies at the university. For my thesis, I am researching about the role tabloid journalism plays in society. Thus, the provisional title of my study is: Exploring the social responsibility of tabloid journalism in South Africa. I am specifically looking at Sunday tabloids. In my study, I would like to find out what Sunday tabloids view as their responsibility towards society and also what they see as socially responsible journalism.

Having stated the nature of my studies, I am hereby humbly requesting to conduct academic research at the *Sunday Sun* newspaper.

Before the university can give me the go ahead to conduct the research, I've to apply for ethical clearance with the university and the ethical clearance committee would like to have proof that I have permission to conduct research where I say I would like to conduct the research. For instance, should you respond saying I am welcome to conduct this research at your newspaper, I will have to submit the email to the ethical clearance committee so that I can receive approval to go ahead with the research.

Should you have any questions or seek clarity on anything, I would be happy to clarify.

I hope that request will meet your favourable approval.

Kind regards

Dimakatso Mokwena

This email and its contents are subject to an email legal notice that can be viewed at: <http://www.saspers.com/disclaimer>. Should you be unable to access the link provided, please email us for a copy at cas@optinet.net

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Wed 2018/08/15 05:15 PM

Dimakatso Mokwena <mokwenad@gmail.com>

Fwd: Re: Request to conduct academic research at the Sunday Sun

To: Mokwena DD - Colonel

Click here to download pictures. To help protect your privacy, Outlook prevented automatic download of some pictures in this message.

On 24 Apr 2017 3:31 PM, "Reggy Moahusi" <R.Moahusi@daily.sun.co.za> wrote:

Good day Dimakatso,

Thanks for writing to me.

I am glad to hear that you have decided to include the Sunday Sun as part of your research proposal in your broader topic.

It will certainly not be a problem for you to conduct the academic research within the Sunday Sun newspaper.

We will await to hear from you when you would like to visit our offices.

Kind Regards,

Right-click here to download pictures. To help protect your privacy, Outlook prevented automatic download of this picture from the Internet.
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Wed 08/15 05:15 PM

Dimakatso Mokwena <mokwenad@gmail.com>

Fwd: Re: Request to conduct academic research at the Sunday Sun

To: Mokwena DD - Colonel

Click here to download pictures. To help protect your privacy, Outlook prevented automatic download of some pictures in this message.

On Mon, 08 May 2017 at 14:14 Reggy Moalusi <RMoalusi@dailysun.co.za> wrote:

Good day Dimakatso,

I am well thanks, I hope you are too.

That should not be a problem.

You will let me know when do you want to visit the office.

With regard to Sunday World, you will have to write to them for such a request.

Regards,

Reggy

Addendum C: Informed consent form



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STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Exploring the social responsibility of tabloid journalism in South Africa – Views from the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun*

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Dimakatso David Mokwena** from the **Department of Journalism** at Stellenbosch University. The data from this interview will form part of research paper for this student's thesis. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your knowledge and experience in the field of tabloid journalism in South Africa.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is aimed at gauging how tabloid journalists view their work, how they engage with their audiences and what they consider to be their responsibility towards their audiences.

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

- Answer questions posed by the researcher and elaborate in great detail as you possibly can
- The interview will last between 15 and 20 minutes and will take place at your place of work and is a once off interview

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are potential risks or discomforts in this study in a sense that the study will require participants to reflect on how they do their work on a daily basis. However, should you feel uncomfortable in any way, kindly please do say so.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

This study will contribute to the production of knowledge in the field of tabloid journalism and will also help journalists understand the role they play in society and in the lives of their readers.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Participants will not receive any payment for taking part in the study.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will become part of a Masters' Degree thesis and such thesis can be accessed at Stellenbosch University library upon completion of the study.

The raw data from this study will be recorded on the researcher's phone and will only be accessible by using the researcher's fingerprints and will be erased once the study is completed and or when this researcher's supervisor is satisfied that the recorded interviews can be deleted.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Dimakatso David Mokwena on 076 563 3725 or at mokwenad@gmail.com or his supervisor on 021 808 2625 or marennet@sun.ac.za.

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to [*me/the subject/the participant*] by Dimakatso David Mokwena in [*Afrikaans/English/* and [*I am/the subject is/the participant is*] in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to [*me/him/her*]. [*I/the participant/the subject*] was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to [*my/his/her*] satisfaction.

[*I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study/I hereby consent that the subject/participant may participate in this study.*] I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Subject/Participant

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

Signature of Subject/Participant or Legal Representative

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ [*name of the subject/participant*] and/or [*his/her*] representative _____ [*name of the representative*]. [*He/she*] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted

in [*Afrikaans/*English/*Xhosa/*Other*] and [*no translator was used/this conversation was translated into*
_____ by _____].

Signature of Investigator

Date

Addendum D: Approval by Research Ethics Committee



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STELLENBOSCH
UNIVERSITY

APPROVAL NOTICE New Application

03 August 2017

Project number: SU-HSD-004937

Project title: Exploring the social responsibility of tabloid journalism in South Africa – Views from the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun*

Dear Dimakatso Mokwena

Your response to modifications received on 25 July 2017 was reviewed by the REC: Humanities and has been approved.

Ethics approval period: 03 August 2017 – 02 August 2020

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: Humanities, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.

Please use your SU project number (SU-HSD-004937) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

FOR CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

Please note that a progress report should be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee: Humanities before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary)

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at cgraham@sun.ac.za.

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

Addendum E: The man in the blue overall

A graphic representation of the man in the blue overall as seen adjacent the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* newsroom reception. The pictures were taken by this researcher on the day that he conducted his interviews.



Another figure representing the man in the blue overall sits prominently in the middle of the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun* newsroom.

